

# BANDWAGON

The Journal of the Circus Historical Society

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The Journal of the Circus Historical Society

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## THIS MONTH'S COVER

Modoc was one of America's best known circus elephants. She was purchased by Leon Washburn in 1907 from a New York animal dealer. She was seven years old at the time. Modoc was later on the James Patterson and Gentry Bros. circuses before being sold to Ringling-Barnum in 1930. She was a huge specimen. In 1935 she weighed 9,180 pounds and was seven feet ten inches tall.

Because of her size she was selected as the "Golden elephant" in the 1933 spec Durbar of Delhi, celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Ringling show. She was ridden in the spec by Helen Leslie, also painted gold. After each performance Modoc was scrubbed and then repainted prior to the next show. The animal man in the photo is unidentified.

The original black and white photo from the Pfening Archives was computer colorized.

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position will be enclosed with the November-December Bandwagon.

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### FINANCIAL STATEMENT May 1, 1994 to April 30, 1995

Cash beginning 5-1-94	21,920.31
Income	45,750.52
Expenses	<u>41,056.67</u>
Cash 5-1-95	26,614.16
INCOME	
Dues	26,053.95
Subscriptions	2,781.00
Back Issue Sales	1,956.93
Bandwagon Advertising	3,958.00
1994 Convention and Auction	9,013.00
Bank Interest	<u>1,987.64</u>
Total Income	45,750.52
EXPENSES	
Bandwagon Printing	30,434.03
Bandwagon Postage	3,085.00
Bandwagon Mailing Prep	1,962.56
Secretary-Treasurer Expense	540.00
1994 Convention Expenses	4,367.25
Dues Notice Printing	479.83
Bank Charges, Foreign Exchange	<u>188.00</u>
Total Expenses	41,056.67
NET GAIN ON YEAR	4,693.85
Submitted by Dale C. Haynes, Secretary-Treasurer	



# The New American Circus

by Ernest Albrecht

The New American Circus revives the traditions of the great one-ring shows of Europe and Russia. Working from personal interviews and other sources, Albrecht traces this revival from the early seventies to the present, sketching the leaders of the new movement and profiling four circuses that have become part of the social and cultural fabric of their communities as well as sources of training in the circus arts: San Francisco's Pickle Family Circus, St. Louis' Circus Flora, The Big Apple Circus, and the Cirque du Soleil.

November. 280 pp. 16 color, 61 b&w photographs, bibliography, index.



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Left: Illustration from poster, The Big Apple Circus. ISBN 0-8130-1364-X Cloth, \$29.95

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## Foreword

### Some Personal Observations

For reasons known only to themselves some circus writers will stall on a particular project for years before putting it into print despite publishing other material regularly. Others never get around to printing it and over the years Bandwagon has obtained notes and partially completed manuscripts from prominent deceased writers.

During my over thirty years as a Bandwagon associate editor I have often been the "push man" to numerous authors, urging them to finish their articles so they can be published. Sometimes I've been successful, other times I've failed and the potential author leaves this world with his project uncompleted. Some, I'm still working on. However, despite all this push and shove on others there is one project of my own which has been an idea for at least forty years. Somehow it always got moved to the back burner--until now, and that is the story of the motorized circus parade in the 1930s.

In the early 1950s when Chappie Fox was working on his celebrated Circus Parades, now a true classic, I contacted him and advised that I hoped he would include a section on the motorized show parade and that I had witnessed some very fine ones. Fox, however, elected to cover only the traditional horse drawn parades associated with railroad circuses. Afterwards I was determined to put this article into print myself. Actually, I had seen only two such parades, both of Downie Bros. in 1933 and 1935.

That 1933 parade remains one of my greatest circus experiences ever, mainly because it was so welcomed at the time. My last parade before Downie had been Sparks in 1928. Other shows came to my Athens, Georgia hometown, John Robinson (twice) and Sells-Floto, but neither parade. The beloved Sparks returned in September 1931 but without a parade. Even at the early age of ten I could tell the show was smaller (15 cars down from 20) and the steam calliope and other parade wagons were missing. Some were there but secured under canvas tarps and unrecognizable to a youngster on the lot. About the same time as the Sparks visit the October 1931 National Geographic appeared in our school library and it sadly told the story that the street parade was dying, almost dead. Only the rather small

# TRUCK CIRCUS PARADES

## From 1930 to 1939

### Part One

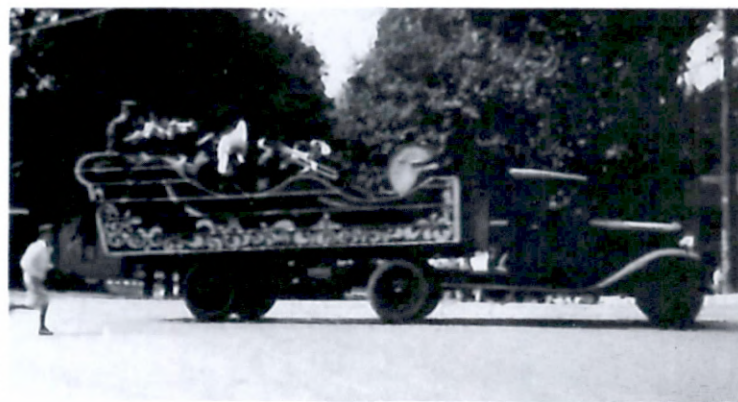
By Joseph T. Bradbury

*Gentry Bros. Famous Shows with a dog and pony format came in 1932, but in October 1933 Charlie Sparks' large motorized Downie Bros. Circus visited. It was the first large truck show I had ever seen. The fine street parade it presented was one of my most welcomed circus sights and it's never been forgotten. A year later the large 46 car Hagenbeck-Wallace railer arrived and I witnessed one of the greatest circus parades ever, but even so, it didn't dim my enthusiasm when only six months later Downie Bros. and its parade came again in April 1935. It was the second stand of the new season. I've never seen any show more beautifully painted. Both Downie parades have never been forgotten and the full story of my recollections of them will be told later.*

### Introduction

Overland shows moving by horse or mule power began adding motor trucks as early as the mid-teens and by end of the decade there had been a few completely motorized circuses. They were unsuccessful operations. During the 1920s the trend toward more and more trucks continued and in 1926 Andrew Downie's Downie Bros. Circus proved that a one hundred percent large motorized circus could be successful. Several of the larger overland outfits, such as Mighty Haag and M. L. Clark and Sons, continued to move with a combination

The Al F. Wheeler No. 1 band semi-parading in Dansville, New York in 1930. Circus World Museum collection.



of motor and equine power until the late 1920s. The larger overland shows, including those using mixed power, paraded during this decade.

In the spring of 1928 *White Tops* editor Karl Knecht conducted a survey of circuses that would tour that year. The following overland troupes responded that they would parade in 1928: Mighty Haag, (two elephants) Seils-Sterling, (six cages, one elephant), Orton Bros. (five cages, three elephants), Silvan-Drew, Atterbury (four cages, one elephant), Barnett Bros. (eight cages, two elephants), Honest Bill Shows (six cages, two elephants), Ketrow Bros. (four cages, one elephant), and Lions Bros. (four cages).

By 1930 horses were gone as a means for moving overland shows, except possibly in a few instances. The term "motorized" replaced "overland" to designate this type of show. The combination of better-surfaced roads (concrete and asphalt) and larger and more powerful trucks led to this change. Tractors and semi-tractors came into use gradually in the late 1920s and beginning in the 1930s became the standard type of vehicle for heavier loads. When Charles Sparks purchased the Downie Bros. Circus from Jimmy Heron in mid-season 1930 one of the first improvements he made was to add a number of tractor and semi-trailer units.

The railroad show parade began dying in the early 1920s and by 1930 only three circuses, Robbins Bros., Christy Bros., and Cole Bros., plus the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West Show, still paraded. In 1931 there were only two, Robbins Bros. and the 101 Ranch. In 1932 no rail shows presented a parade as a regular feature, although Sells-Floto and John Robinson Combined paraded the final week of the season.

By contrast, the very early 1930s saw the parade flourish on the larger truck shows. Few rail show paraded, but it was the rule among the big motorized outfits as seven of them presented the daily march in 1930. The perception among the populace that rail circuses were larger than motorized shows was generally true, although a few truckers did grow and became equal in size to a fifteen or even twenty car show. To combat this perception the larger motorized shows paraded in order to better ad-



vertise themselves. This proved to be very effective, especially when railers' street parades all but disappeared.

In 1930 A1 F. Wheeler's New Model Shows proudly announced it would present an all-motorized parade, this being at a time when colorful trucks in small towns were still a novelty. Since that show had no elephant there wasn't one lumbering along on foot to break the motorized pace. In 1935 the single elephant on the Tom Mix Circus made parade riding in a truck. By the end of the thirties Parker & Watts was priding itself on presenting a horse drawn parade, just like its rail show cousins. However, there were some motor units in the march. Likewise, for years most railers had one or more trucks in parade, often pulling the steam calliope, or even the Five Graces bandwagon on Hagenbeck-Wallace in 1934.

The motorized show parades of the 1930s, although presenting a wide diversity in the size and type of the individual units, basically followed the same pattern and were organized in the manner of a railroad show march. Mounted flag bearers led the parade and, as traditional, a calliope, usually air, brought up the rear. In between were the lead bandwagon, sometimes using a rather small straight bed truck, other times a large semi that had been used to transport horses or other stock between stands. Present were some or all of the show's cages ranging from as few as three on Walter L. Main in 1931 to eight on Downie Bros. in 1935. Main used multi-den semis while Downie had spacious two-den straight trucks. Tom Mix used small, mainly single den, straight truck cages. In 1934 Lee Bros. used a number of former Christy Bros. rail show cross cages pulled by ponies. Seal Bros in 1937 and Parker & Watts in 1938-1939 used much larger equine powered cage wagons. Caged animals consisted mainly of lions, tigers, leopards, bears, monkeys, some deer, a few birds, but no large beasts such as hippos or rhinos. Among the cat animals parading were those of the caged act, usually only a few, but in the case of Allen King's cat animals on Rice Bros in mid-late season 1935, a considerable number, ten or more.

So far research has turned up only one example of a steam calliope in a motorized parade in the 1930s, that being E. E. Coleman's steamer which was formerly on a river boat and later truck mounted by him. Coleman rented it to several shows in the early and middle years of decade. It was on Rice Bros in 1935 and perhaps others. He



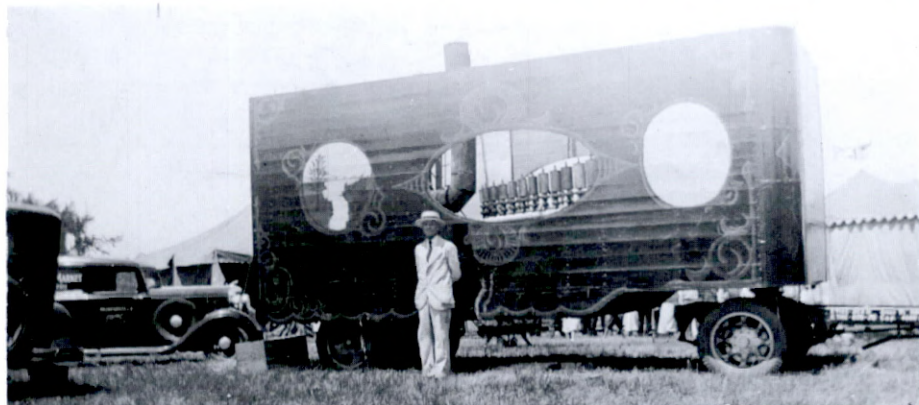
The Schell Bros. Circus elephants parading in Lidgerwood, North Dakota on June 7, 1930. Circus World Museum collection.

sold it to the new Parker & Watts Circus and was a feature of that show's parades in 1938 and 1939.

Also in the parades of the 1930s were the customary tableau trucks, some especially designed with a flat bed platform which could be used for costumed performers to ride on. Sam B. Dill's 1930 Gentry Bros. had several custom-built vehicles for this purpose. Downie Bros. also utilized a number of similar vehicles. Mounted riders were dispersed throughout the parade and the show's lead stock, camels and elephants ordinarily walked near the end. Elephant herds ranged from a single pacyderm to as many as nine on Barnett Bros. 1931 after leasing the 101 Ranch group of five. In 1935 Downie also had nine after purchasing Asa Candler's Cola herd of four shortly into the season. These shows set the record up to that time for the number of elephants carried by a truck show.

Musical groups included the big show band, broken down into two groups on the larger shows, plus a clown band, and side show band, just like the railers had. Miscellaneous units were found in most parades, such as equine-drawn Roman chariots, clowns on bicycles, even stilt walkers, and often near the front of

E. E. Coleman and his steam calliope. Author's collection.



the march an advertising promotion for automobile dealers.

### Format

This article will organize the information into yearly segments. First will be a listing of circuses known to have presented a parade as a daily feature for at least part of a season. Occasional one day parades for a special purpose will not be included as virtually all shows, even to this day, have at times put on such a march or at least contributed units to one.

The majority of information in this listing came from *Billboard*. Most information is assumed to be accurate, however in one instance *Billboard* erred in reporting Haag Bros. would not parade in 1938, but circus fan Joe Heiser saw the show that fall in Louisiana. It did parade and some of his photos are used here. Since it is intended to give wide photographic coverage to the various parades this article will be published in two installments to allow more to be printed. Priority will be given to photos showing the parade actually on the street or forming on the lot; however, when these are not obtainable pictures of parade vehicles parked on the lot or elsewhere will be used.

All known detailed parade lineups will be printed. This is in no way a definitive work. Footnotes will not be used. Items from the *Billboard* will be identified by date of the particular issue such as a 1-1-30 BB.

Also listed at the end of each season





Lead riders and the No. 1 Downie Bros. band truck parading in Warren, Rhode Island in 1930. Author's collection.

will be the railroad circuses parading. By coincidence 1939 was the final year for both motorized and railroad show parades until a brief revival of the daily march twelve seasons later.

### 1930

Motorized circuses parading in 1930 included Gentry Bros., Downie Bros., Barnett Bros., Schell Bros., Al F. Wheeler's New Model Shows, Walter L. Main, and Mighty Haag.

The most spectacular of the 1930 motorized marches was Sam B. Dill's new Gentry Bros. Circus. Dill, a former associate of Mugivan and Bowers, secured the Gentry Bros. title from the Donaldson Lithograph Co. which had foreclosed on Floyd King's 1929 Gentry circus. The show was framed in West Baden, Indiana. Dill secured forty new GMC trucks though an advertising tie-in with the General Motors Corporation. The Kentucky Wagon Works in nearby Louisville converted the trucks for circus use. Included were eight straight cage trucks with two and three dens housing lions, leopards, pumas, monkeys and cocatoos. There were also five bungalow tableaux (so called because they looked like small houses on truck

Gentry Bros. Circus big show band semi in 1930. Pfening Archives.



beds), ten nation floats, two audio-phones, an air calliope, and three band trucks.

Dill later bought three new 18 foot semi-trailers in Louisville on September 22, 1930. They were painted to represent old style bandwagons with one picturing a shell, another a rose, and the third a peacock.

Dill presented an extensive and spectacular parade that consisted of sixteen



The Mighty Haag No. 1 band truck during a parade in 1930. Pfening Archives.

mounted riders; three band wagons with the ten piece big show band, the black side show band and a clown band; eight cages; four bungalow tableaux; a number of flat bed straight trucks; a panel truck with an air calliope; three elephants, Katie, George and Juno leased from the Hall farm; and two camels. (5-10-30 BB).

The March-April 1955 *White Tops* noted that some cages were beautifully decorated with corner posts and plenty of



A Downie Bros. cage truck in Warren, Rhode Island on July 12, 1930. Author's collection.

scroll work. Photos picture the big show band on a straight bed truck with musical lyres and the show's title on the sides. The big show and side show bands were all black. At least two different bungalow type tableau trucks appeared in parade photographs.

A review of Downie Bros. (7-1-30 BB) noted the parade included three "go-getting" bands, Scotch bagpipers, an air calliope, five tableau trucks with performers riding on top, ten open cage dens, a string of lead ponies, two clown carts, two camels, two elephants, twenty-seven trucks and trailers in all.

Photos show the Downie No. 1 band on a straight bed truck with the title on the sides and tableau truck No. 31 with a large painting on each side pulled a cage trailer. The clown band truck carried musicians in standard big show band uniforms as well as clown costumes. The elephants wore banners advertising local merchants.

This was the last use of cage trailers by Downie. After Charles Sparks bought the circus from Jimmy Heron in mid-season he began adding semis to the fleet. There is no evidence of

A two den Gentry Bros. cage in a 1930 parade. Pfening Archives.







A bungalow tableau leads a number of Gentry Bros. parade trucks lined up in 1930. Pfening Archives.

any of the new semis being used in a parade in 1930.

A review of the Barnett Bros. (9-13-30 BB) said the parade used twenty large trucks, about ten of which were tableaux with ornaments and scenic sides. All were painted in bright colors and were in efficient mechanical condition. An air calliope with a self playing roll of music also appeared in the parade. There were four cages containing a lion, a kangaroo, an unidentified animal, and a large monkey. One medium size elephant made the march.

Schell Bros. paraded using four elephants and three camels (4-26-30 BB). Both semis and straight bed trucks were in the parade. Some had large side paintings. The No. 1 band rode in a semi-trailer.

A review of the Al F. Wheeler circus reported, "The parade looks like a million dollars and is responsible in a large measure for the show's success. Parade consists of twenty trucks with plenty of music and hilarity, and is motorized throughout" (8-30-30 BB). Other reports listed from five to seven cages. There was no elephant. Photos indicate the big show band rode a semi and there was an air calliope bringing up the rear.

Air calliope truck used by Hunt's Circus in 1931. Pfening Archives.



Walter L. Main paraded and had one of the largest menageries carried by a motorized show. All cages were straight trucks. (6-21-30 BB)

A review of the Mighty Haag circus noted a flashy parade was given daily. There were two elephants (7-26-30 BB).

Railroad circuses parading in 1930 were Robbins Bros., Christy Bros., and Cole Bros., and Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West.

#### 1931

Motorized circuses parading in 1931 included: Downie Bros., Barnett Bros., Schell Bros., Wheeler & Sautelle, Walter L. Main, Mighty Haag, Snyder Bros., Hunt's, and Circo Valencia.

Downie Bros. takes the prize for the largest and most spectacular motorized circus parade that year. A review noted "every car and parade trailer has been elaborately decorated" (4-18-31 BB). A large Kelty photo pictures the entire Downie parade showing it was an impressive march. Photos show the famous art work by Ernest Gosch. The Crusader was on the side of the No. 1 band truck. During the winter the cage trucks had been rebuilt with larger cage compartments plus a bunk compartment for the driver in the cab. A large flat bed vehicle was ridden in parade by the Morales family. With the purchase of two of the 1930 Cole Bros. elephants the herd totaled five. Two large semis, which transported the elephants, flanked the herd during the parade.

Available Barnett Bros. images picture a tableau truck with a large jungle scene on the side. A short clown band truck featured scenes of a trainer and performing horses. A lion cage was much smaller than those on Downie. Photos of the 1931 Barnett parade in Dunkirk, New York show two mounted flag bearers, No. 17 clown bandwagon, No. 54 cage with lions, a two horse chariot, No. 56 tableau with tiger painted on the side and four elephants.

The *Billboard* (5-9-31) reported that Schell Bros., owned by George E. Engesser, featured a parade with sixty-



The Crusader tableau on Downie Bros. in 1931. Pfening Archives.

five trucks and cages, twenty mounted riders, three bands, and other animals.



The Wheeler & Sautelle air calliope truck in Wakefield, Rhode Island on September 1, 1931. Author's collection.

A report from Schell Bros. in response to a survey for the 1931 season conducted by the *White Tops* stated that the show had nine cages. The Schell animals included four elephants, two camels, one sacred cattle, three lions, one tiger, three leopards, two pumas, three bears, two baboons, and ten monkeys. Most of these animals probably appeared in the parade.

Wheeler & Sautelle, a title change from the 1930 Al F. Wheeler's New Model Shows but under the same ownership and management, was said to have four new semi-trailers, 20 feet





A Walter L. Main three den semi cage parading in 1931. Author's collection.

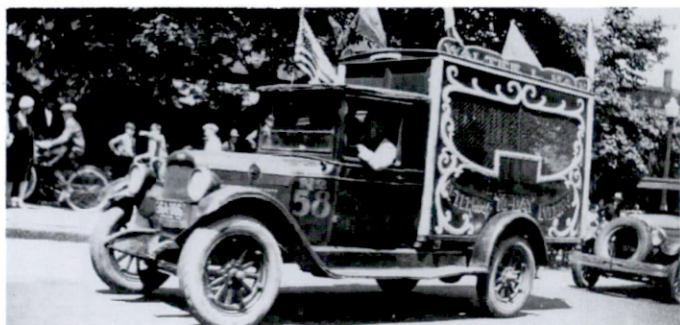
long, attractively built for parade purposes (4-4-31 BB). The show still had no elephant and much of the parade was believed to have been about the same as the previous year. The new title was prominently displayed.

A feature of the Walter L. Main show was the parade (4-4-31 BB). Twenty-one cage trucks and tableau were used. "It has real flash with four bands, twelve mounts, sixteen ponies, two elephants, five camels, and a air calliope (5-2-31 BB)." Photos picture three cage semis, housing mainly the wild animal act.

The *Billboard* (5-2-31) said Mighty Haag opened April 15 at Marianna, Florida with the usual street parade at 1 P. M.

A new one, Snyder Bros., moved on ten trucks, four cage trailers, and had an air calliope. A parade was given (4-4-31 BB).

The Downie Bros. parade in downtown Englewood, New Jersey on August 14, 1931. Pfening Archives.



The Walter L. Main air calliope truck in Attleboro, Massachusetts on May 27, 1931. Author's collection.

Only two railroad shows paraded in 1931, Robbins Bros and Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West.

### 1932

Motorized circuses parading in 1932 included: Downie Bros., Barnett Bros., Schell Bros., Sam B. Dill, Mighty Haag, Snyder Bros., Harrington Nickle Plate, and Sam Dock.

The nation celebrated the bicentennial of George Washington's birth that year and several circuses used the Washington theme in their specs and parades. None was more spectacular than

Downie Bros. which was the largest of the motorized field. *Billboard* reported a parade would be given during the coming season and that a new semi had been built for the No. 1 band truck whose sides had a full size painting of Washington Crossing the Delaware. Another new semi had a painting of Ben Hur's chariot race. The



The Mighty Haag air calliope truck used in 1931. Pfening Archives.

claimed the family name to put out a new show using that moniker, Dill renamed his show Famous Robbins. For unknown reasons his show did not parade in 1931 although it would be resumed in 1932 and succeeding seasons.







Downie Bros. Circus Georgia Minstrel tableau in 1932. Pfening Archives.

parade had been strengthened by the addition of eighteen head of ring stock and many large and impressive floats (4-9-32 BB). The No. 1 band truck also had a well decorated skyboard with a bust portrait of Washington in the center.

Gordon Potter witnessed the Downie parade on August 31 in Benton Harbor, Michigan, and made the following listing:

- 5 Girls riding horses.
  - Semi trailer, sound system truck.
  - Semi trailer, band truck.
  - Cage truck, lion.
  - Truck carrying male performers.
  - Cage truck, leopard.
  - Truck with bagpiper.
  - Semi trailer with clowns.
  - Cage truck, monkeys and hyena.
  - Truck with clown band.
  - Cage truck, lions.
  - Semi trailer with five girls.
  - Cage truck, monkeys.
  - Cart pulled by one pony.
  - Truck.
  - Five mounted cowboys.
  - Cage truck, bears.
  - Chariot pulled by four ponies.
  - Chariot pulled by four ponies.
  - Truck with side show band.
  - Cage truck, lions.
  - Two girls riding and driving two horses.
  - Semi trailer with Morales family riding.
  - Cage truck, tiger.
  - Four camels.
  - Semi trailer for elephants.
  - Five elephants.
  - Air calliope truck.
  - Clown Ford.
  - Small truck.
  - One man riding horse.
- Totals for parade were 18 horses, 9 ponies, 5 elephants, 4 camels, 1 car, 8 cages, 23 trucks including cages. Photos taken that year show the clown band tableau had three panels of jungle scenes, and the side show band truck was decorated with minstrel performers and titled



The Morales family semi-trailer in a 1932 Downie Bros. parade. Pfening Archives.

Georgia Minstrels. Truck No. 15 had a painting of Indians hunting buffalo. Photos also show a band riding the truck with the Crusader painting. This truck had been the No. 1 bandwagon in 1931. Potter did not list it, possibly because it didn't parade that day. A dog and pig cage truck is also pictured in the Downie parade.

Barnett Bros. marched the four mile downtown parade route in Gastonia, North Carolina and drew much favorable comment. (4-23-32 BB). Barnett had 2 elephants, a camel, 3 lions, 6 monkeys, a kangaroo, a bear, 6 macaws, and 6 ponies (4-23-32 BB). It can be assumed that all paraded. Photos show a small pony drawn cage wagon. Another photo pictures a line of parade trucks all extensively decorated, some with full side paintings.

A Fox Movietone commercial short shows mostly the 1932 Walter L. Main Circus. That outfit did not parade that season, so Fox used Barnett Bros. parade footage, which caused all kinds of confusion when the late Roger Boyd located a copy. Later a *Billboard* note was discovered stating three shows had been used, Main, Barnett Bros., and Ringling-Barnum. The Barnett parade scenes show an auto and two mounted flag girls leading. Then came the No. 1 band on a well decorated straight bed truck, an open platform truck with seated performers, a two-humped Asiatic camel, a January mule cart, and the clown band on a truck with signs giving

Pony drawn cage on Barnett Bros. in 1932. Author's collection.



admission prices on the sides. The side show band was on a truck with "BB" painted on the skyboard, a positive identification of the show. A short air calliope truck brings up the rear. No semis are seen in the parade.

Schell Bros. gave a parade with 2 bands, an air calliope, 12 mounted people, 25 trucks and cages, elephants and camels (4-9-32 BB).

The Sam B. Dill show, which did not parade in 1931, resumed the daily march in 1932. A review stated it was greatly strengthened with additional new cages, 15 Texas Pinto ponies, and had new wardrobe made for parade and spec (4-16-32-BB). A full page *GMC* ad in the November 19, 1932 *Billboard* showed a large semi with the No. 1 band. The title is on the side as well as the admission price of 25 cents in a large circle. Another *GMC* ad pictured an open monkey cage. After William P. Hall died in 1932 his heirs, fearful that Dill would not make payments for the elephants, took them back, leaving Dill with no bulls. However, he was able to purchase Gentry Babe from George W. Christy. She became the elephant herd as long as Dill owned the show. An often told tale stated that he was chided for having but one elephant on his show. He replied, "one is enough, they all look alike anyway."

An article on the Sam B. Dill circus in the January-February and March-April 1951 *White Tops* noted the 1932 parade included about 12 vehicles, 3 bandwagons, 8 cages, and an air calliope. Large semis, used for the bandwagons, were beautifully painted with the show's title and plenty of scroll decorations. Gordon Potter saw the circus in Benton Harbor, Michigan on May 30, 1932 before the Hall elephants left and Gentry Babe arrived. He listed the following animals in the menagerie, all or most are presumed to have been in





the parade: 3 elephants, 7 horses, 6 ponies, 3 mules, and 10 cages.

The 1932 Dill parade used the same trucks as the 1930 Gentry Bros. Circus. Photographs of the 1932 Dill parade identify the following units:

- Three lady riders.
- #40 Straight truck cage.
- #41 Straight truck cage, lion.
- #42 Straight truck cage, cockatoos.
- #43 Straight truck cage.
- #44 Straight truck cage.
- #45 Straight truck cage, deer.
- #46 Straight truck cage, monkeys.
- #47 Straight truck cage, monkeys.
- #49 Straight truck cage, puma
- #81 Semi bandwagon, big top band.

This group of 1932 Dill pictures were taken by a professional photographer and used in a brochure by the advance agent. Pfening Archives.

- #85 Straight truck, lady performers under umbrella.
- #87 Semi, clown band.
- #88 Straight truck, lady performers under umbrella.
- #99 Semi, bandwagon, side show band.
- #100 Straight truck cage, American eagle.
- #102 Panel truck with air calliope.
- Straight truck, bungalow, "Home of Rex, movie dog."

- Straight truck, bungalow. Three elephants.

*Billboard* (7-2-32 and 9-3-32) reported that the Mighty Haag Show paraded using 5 large motorized cages, 2 elephants, a zebra, a camel, a large baboon, a kangaroo, and monkeys. One reviewer reported 9 cages, probably counting individual dens which was often done. In all probability the circus had no more than 5 cage vehicles. Photos show a fairly large straight bed chariot type truck used as the No. 1 bandwagon and a short truck for the air calliope.

Snyder Bros., moving on 12 trucks, paraded, having an untamable lion





Some of the trucks used in the Harrington's Nickle Plate Circus 1932 parade. Author's collection.

and several cages of animals (6-18-32 BB).

Harrington's Nickle Plate Shows presented a street parade with units of its Washington Bicentennial spec. The march included 2 lion cages, 2 other cats, 2 hyenas, monkeys, ostriches, a zebra, and a deer (6-4-32 BB). Photos picture a well decorated cage trailer and trucks painted for parade purposes.

*Billboard* reported that Sam Dock's Circus started parading in mid-July which had helped business (7-23-32 BB).

*Billboard* (3-26-32) in an article on the Seils-Sterling Circus said the Washington Bicentennial motif would be carried out in circus decorations and the parade. The show had a new lion den with fine pictorials of Washington as truck decorations, 4 lions, 2 elephants and a hyena in its menagerie. However, a full review of the show (4-30-32 BB) made no mention of a parade. It is believed the show possibly only used a large well decorated open type semi to send the band downtown as a bally each day. This was

The Sam B. Dill parade line up is pictured in this Keltly photo taken in Minnola, New York on June 19, 1933. Pfening Archives.

done for several seasons during the 1930s by Seils-Sterling.

For the first time since railroads became the standard method of transportation for the larger shows no circus of that category

presented a street parade as a major feature in 1932, with the sole exception of Sells-Floto and John Robinson Combined (the Robinson name was added for the southern tour in late summer) which did parade during the last week of the season.

### 1933

During the 1933 season these motorized circuses paraded: Downie Bros., Barnett Bros., Schell Bros., Sam B. Dill and Mighty Haag.

Isaac Marcks saw the Downie Bros. parade in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, on June 23. He listed 5 ladies on horseback, a clown cart, 2 mounted ladies, 2 chariots with 4 ponies each, a Funny Ford, 4 camels, 5 elephants, and 8 cages. He noted a total of 22 vehicles in the parade, but other than the 8 cages he did not specify the type of the others which would have been bandwagons tableaus, air calliope, etc.

The author witnessed the Downie Bros. street parade in Athens, Georgia on October 5, 1933. It was a memorable day in my circus life, the first large motorized circus I had ever seen. In April 1932 the small Gentry Bros. show visited, moving on about a dozen trucks. There had been no street parade in Athens since Sparks in 1928 and even though that show was in town in September 1931 the daily march had been discontinued. So I was circus hungry.

At the time I was in junior high school located on Childs Street. About 11:30 in

the morning we were permitted to leave the school and walk about a block down to Prince Avenue to watch the parade pass by. The high school was on the other side of the street so students from both schools lined the sidewalks. Prince Avenue led to the downtown area about a half mile away. The show was on the Hillcrest Avenue lot about a mile away. It was a relatively new lot, being broken in by Sparks in 1931 and used by Gentry the following year. I made no written notes on the various parade units but feel sure it was about the same as recorded by Gordon Potter in 1932. Most impressive was the No. 1 band semi with the beautiful painting of Washington Crossing the Delaware. Equally stunning was a similar semi with a painting of Ben Hur's Roman chariot race. The painting on the later covered both sides as well as the rounded front end. For the life of me I cannot remember who rode on the vehicle, probably a trampoline was set in it as was done in other seasons. The side show and clown bands rode straight bed trucks as described in 1932. I feel sure there was no No. 2 big show band truck. Vehicles moved very slowly at the same speed as did mounted people, camels, and elephants.

One rather spectacular vehicle was a flat bed type semi with the Morales family on it. Clowns and costumed performers were everywhere it seemed, riding on top of the trucks. There were at least eight cages, possibly nine in the march. Most were large two den straight bed trucks. Bringing up the rear were five elephants, all Asian, Teddy, a large tusker, Tena, Babe, Queen, and Pinto and four camels, all Asiatic two humped animals. The air calliope was in a colorful straight bed truck with wooden organ pipe posts on the sides.

Both the Washington and the Ben







Barnett Bros. tableau with clown band in 1933. Frank Pouska photo.

Hur semis were open tops used to transport lead stock. Before the parade planks were placed on the top between the skyboards for the band on the former. It is assumed grooms thoroughly cleaned the bottom of the vehicle where the horses had ridden before the band mounted for parade.

After the parade we went back to school but were dismissed for the day at 1 P. M. in order to attend the mat-

in that locality it was the so called "Rite of Passage" year for a young boy. True, you now had to pay adult prices at the circus and movies, but you were now able to visit the circus lot on your own, hunt by yourself with a shotgun or 22 rifle, fish at the river or creek, even join the Boy Scouts which was a major honor in those days. So, from then on I did the circus scene by myself, if necessary, but I still usually went with neighborhood boys. But no more parental rule that I could not go to see the Sells-Floto (with Tom Mix himself), and circus trains ar-



Barnett Bros. elephant semi in a 1933 parade. Pfening Archives.

rated. The air calliope had a hexagon shaped opening near the front with fake organ pipes. The show's title and admission price of 25 cents were painted on the sides.

Photos of the 1933 Barnett parade identify:

- Three mounted flag bears.
- #45 Tableau, big show band.
- #9 Tableau, side show band.
- #6 Elephant truck.
- Tableau, clown band.
- Straight truck, 3 den cage
- Straight truck, 3 den cage.
- Straight truck, 2 den cage.
- Straight truck, 2 den cage.
- Straight truck, air calliope.

Four elephants.

*Billboard* said that Schell paraded during the season (7-29-33 BB).

*Billboard* (4-15-33) noted the Sam B. Dill Circus parade with a brilliantly redecorated band chariot, open cages, mounted people, led stock, clown contingent, and other attractions, "aroused all the attention and interest indicative of the hold the parade had on the American public."

A Kelty photo of the Sam B. Dill show pictures a parade of major proportions lined up on the street adjacent to the lot. It appears to duplicate the 1932 Dill march.

The Mighty Haag Show paraded with regular floats (7-15-33 BB).

Many shows at times would parade during a season for some special

A three den cage in a 1933 Barnett parade. Frank Pouska photo.



Barnett Bros. Circus four elephants in a 1933 parade. Frank Pouska photo.

inee. I walked immediately to the lot and arrived in plenty of time for a lot tour before the performance started. In the menagerie I listed the following animals in cages: three lions, three lions, ten monkeys, one jaguar and one leopard, one hyena and one black bear, one tiger, one lion, one lion, and a dog and pig.

My visit to Downie Bros. had additional significance. I had hit the magic age of 12 back in April. In those days

The Barnett Bros. big show band on tableau No. 45. Pfening Archives.

iving and unloading unless my older brother went with me, which happily he did. In fact less than a month from the Downie date, a younger boy in the neighborhood was entrusted to my care and we left at daylight on Saturday, November 4, 1933 to see Gentry Bros. arrive and set upon the same Hillcrest Avenue lot.

Barnett Bros. continued parading in 1933. All the parade trucks were freshly painted and trimmed in silver leaf letters. Two new semi-trailer tableau trucks were added (5-6-33 BB). Photos indicate that straight bed trucks continued to be used for most of the band vehicles. Four elephants were pa-







The Seils-Sterling big show band parading in Beloit, Wisconsin on May 24, 1934. Circus World Museum collection.



Seils-Sterling semi No. 15 with lady riders in 1934. Circus World Museum collection.

event. Such a march was held on July 4 at Monona, Iowa when Seal Bros., owned by Bud Anderson, participated in the parade given by Monona businessmen (7-2-33 BB).

Although the larger motorized shows paraded during this period many communities were paradeless for many years. It was reported that Barnett Bros. gave the first parade in Moline, Illinois in fifteen years (8-26-33 BB).

No railroad circus presented a parade in 1933 on daily basis; however, Hagenbeck-Wallace, now enlarged to 40 cars, gave several during the season. The tremendous success of these marches led to the decision to restore the parade on that show as a regular feature the next season.

#### 1934

Only five circuses paraded in 1934: Downie Bros., Barnett Bros., Sam B. Dill and Tom Mix Roundup (late in the season the title was changed to Tom Mix Circus), Lee Bros., and Seils-Sterling.

The Downie Bros. parade drew little *Billboard* coverage during the season although it was noted the show was presenting the daily march (4-21-31 BB). Photos indicate little, if any,

Harry Carey, movie cowboy, was featured on the side of this parade tableau with Barnett Bros. in 1934. Circus World Museum collection.

changes were made in the parade vehicles, with the exception that Jack Hoxie, the show's feature western movie star attraction, paraded his truck and horse trailer. It was lettered "Jack Hoxie Special."

Roger Boyd owned a fine movie of the Downie parade taken May 29 at Courtland, New York. It was not complete and was filmed at more than one location, thus a detailed parade sequence is difficult to determine. Leading are two flag girls and two other riders on horseback, No. 1 band riding the Washington Crossing the Delaware semi, clown cart pulled by a mule, Ben Hur semi with a trampoline and performers, side show band on the Georgia Minstrels truck, Jack Hoxie truck and horse trailer, tandem horse, chariot pulled by four ponies, clown band riding No. 55 truck, flat bed semi with the Morales family, chariot pulled by four ponies, three camels, five elephants and air calliope truck. Several cages, a number of riders on horseback, and a stilt walker are also shown.

Why the fourth camel didn't parade that day is not known. It was counted in another eyewitness account written by a young Don Marcks to his father, Isaac, who was away from their Pittsfield, Massachusetts home in California on business and making preparations for the family to move there. The letter read: "While you are out there in California you are going to miss a lot of circuses right here at home."

"Yesterday the Downie Bros. Circus was here [July 11, 1934] and they played on the Elm Street Playgrounds. I

didn't go to school of course, for seeing the circus is so much more important.

"I liked the show but don't know if I was as able to get as much information as you usually do, about the equipment, etc."

"They must have had about fifty or more trucks. They had the big top, menagerie, side show and several small tents."

"The parade was real nice. They had four girls with flags, some flower girls, Arabs, cages and trucks, four camels five elephants, and some riders."

*Billboard* reported (5-12-34) that Barnett Bros. had a dozen trucks in the parade, of which the greater part carried mounted performers and band units. Photos picture the big show band riding a large semi with the show's title in huge letters. The show had both two and three den straight bed cages. The clown band rode a truck advertising Harry Carey.

The prize unit in the parade was a line of nine elephants, the largest number to have appeared with a motorized show up to that time. The lease of the five 101 Ranch herd gave them the large number. The elephant semi was ahead of the bulls. Also in the parade were a clown pony cart, and a

Barnett Bros. three den cage No. 59 appeared in the 1934 parade. Circus World Museum collection.







Former Christy Bros. cross cages appeared in the 1934 Lee Bros. parade. Circus World Museum collection.

chariot pulled by two ponies.

A movie of the Barnett Bros. parade at Bay City, Michigan, although probably not complete, shows the following units: Three girls on horseback with trumpets, clown on bicycle, straight bed cage truck, stilt walker, clown band on straight truck, No. 1 band on semi, wild west riders, rube clown on a mule, seven horseback riders strung out in single file, nine elephants, and an air calliope with the show's title on the side.

Lee Bros., owned by George W. Christy, and managed by his brother Harold, had made two short tours in 1933, but went out for a full season in 1934 with a street parade. *Billboard* noted (4-21-34) that the Lee Bros. parade would be a feature with special parade tableau trucks built. Later, *Billboard* (5-26-34) said the trucks were painted red and orange. Finally, (7-14-34) it mentioned the parade had mostly mounted riders and miniature animal cages drawn by ponies.

After the Christy Bros. 20 car railroad show ceased operation in mid-season 1930 Christy formed a circus unit consisting of elephants, horses, and a menagerie using several of the

Lead flag bearer of the Sam B. Dill Circus and Tom Mix Round Up parade in San Pedro, California in 1934. Circus World Museum collection.

small cross cage type vehicles that had once been carried by the rail show. The circus unit, all or in part, was rented to various shows throughout the 1930s. These animals were part of Lee Bros. in 1934.

Fortunately we have an eyewitness, a participant in the Lee Bros. march. Walter Van Dyck of Biloxi, Mississippi, provided the following: "During the season of 1934 I was on Lee Bros. Circus, a truck show owned by the Christy broth-



Six Sam B. Dill cage trucks ready for a parade in 1934. Author's collection.

ers. It was a medium size outfit of probably 12 to 15 trucks. Much of the Christy railroad show equipment and personnel was used and we paraded. We had a side show band, an eight piece big show band and ten to twelve cage wagons. It was a fairly good parade for a show of that size.

"As far as the time it took to make a parade, of course, that could vary a great deal. I would say that an hour to an hour and a half would be a good average time. We were not paid extra for the parade, and if we were careless we could be paid less. Some circuses as such

Christy had very strict rules while on parade wagons, such as no smoking, no gum chewing, drunkenness, or talking to towners. Fines were a dollar which was taken out of your paycheck."

Sam B. Dill-Tom Mix paraded using essentially the same equipment as in 1933 with the Mix title added. Cages were lettered on the side mudboards, Sam B. Dill's Circus, and on the rear mudboards, Tom Mix and Tony. The show's single elephant rode in a truck.

Although there was no mention in the *Billboard* Seils-Sterling paraded in 1934. Sverre Braathen photographed these units in Beloit, Wisconsin on June 15:

#5 Semi, Cage with four dens.

#15 Semi Horse van with Japanese riders.

#16 Semi, Clown band.

#18 Semi, Shell bandwagon.

#30 Air calliope.

Chariot, pulled by three horses.

Two cowboy on horseback.

Four ponies, led by boys.

Two elephants.

One camel.

The Seils-Sterling route book states the the parade was discontinued on October 6, 1934 in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, although the season did not end until October 27.

The Hagenbeck-Wallace, traveling on 40 cars, was the only railroad circus parading in 1934. It was one of the all-time great street marches, which fortunately the author witnessed.

Sam B. Dill-Tom Mix parade in Decatur, Illinois in 1934. Pfening Archives.





### Introduction

Fred Dahlinger asked me to write a biography of my life and times in show business and requested that I start "at the beginning." Since we are talking about a span of a half a century I cannot include every single event and anecdote, some of which I will have to save for another time.

I was born in Boston and though I did not come from a show business family, I developed a fascination with show business in general and circuses in particular at a very early age. In fact, I began reading the *Billboard* every week at age 12. Massachusetts was prime spring circus territory and as a boy, and later as a teen, I saw most of them--Ringling-Barnum, Sells-Floto, 101 Ranch, Sparks, Christy Bros., Floyd King's Gentry Bros., Fred Buchanan's 1931 Robbins Bros., Walter L. Main, Wheeler & Sautelle, Downie Bros., Kay Bros., Gorman Bros., Barnett Bros., Russell Bros., Tom Mix, Cole Bros., and the Adkins and Terrell 1938 Robbins Bros. And as a kid I also saw the great magicians of the time--Houdini, Howard Thurston and Harry Blackstone, Senior.

I got out of high school during the Great Depression. I had passed the college entrance exams but, of course, had no money. However, since I lived only a block away from Harvard University, the tuition in those days was only \$400 a year and books were available second-hand, I figured I could work my way through. The going pay scale for student employment was 50 cents an hour. I beat that by a big margin by acting as a sightseeing guide for the flocks of tourists who, even in those depression days, came to Boston during the summer to see the points of historic interest. This netted me \$60 to \$80 a week during July and August, which was fantastic money for the times.

The rest of the year I did a variety of things, one of which was working as a candy butcher at the Old Howard burlesque theater some nights and weekends. The Howard was a very old building, originally built as a church but serving as a theater since Civil War days. It had a distinctive smell, caused by decades of tobacco smoke swirling through its musty auditorium. At most burlesque houses the

# A LIFETIME IN SHOW BUSINESS

By Bill English

butchers worked only at intermission for the candy or book pitch. At the Howard, however, we worked the aisles with soda, popcorn and ice cream throughout the performance.

I well recall some of the baggy-pants comedians who played there at the time, including Sliding Billy Watson, Billy "Cheese and Crackers" Hagen, Binder & Rosen, and Katz & Fields. I remember Mike Katz was blind and had to be walked on and off stage by Alice Kennedy, a "talking woman" (term for a female straight man). I also remember famous strippers of the era, including Ann Corio, Hinda Wausau, Margie Hart and Tempest Storm.

Another thing I did a few times was to act as an "extra" in productions at the

Bill English making a side show opening on Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. in 1961. All illustrations are from the author unless otherwise credited.



Shubert Theater and the Boston Opera House. The extras, mostly students, were to stand or mill around in the background. This was more for fun than profit, because the pay scale was one dollar a performance. While working as an extra at the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo in the Opera House I got my first experience of "performer temperament." A feature ballerina was having a screaming tantrum backstage just before curtain. When the curtain

went up she went on and performed perfectly. As soon as the curtain fell she paused for a few seconds to remember where she had left off and then resumed her screaming tantrum.

After graduation I took a job with a Boston investment firm at the princely salary of \$100 a month (normal for the time and place). But it was not long before I was in the Army Corps of Engineers attached to the Air Force. Our mission was to build bomber bases and advance landing strips for fighter planes. I served overseas for just under four years in England, Algeria, Tunisia, Italy, Corsica and France and went on three invasions. I went in as a private and came out as a lieutenant, having received a field commission in Italy in 1944. However, I was definitely not a "war hero" as we only came under enemy fire twice in four years.

When I got out of the service I returned to a conventional job and got married but, having seen a lot of the world and spent a lot of time sleeping on the ground or in abandoned barns, I was anxious to get into show business and in 1949 I thought I saw a golden opportunity. George Hamid operated the Steel Pier in Atlantic City and also had a lease on the Million Dollar Pier. Hamid gave up this lease and a group from Philadelphia took it over to install a midway of carnival rides, shows and concessions. I got some money together and got the exclusive on popcorn, candy apples and floss. It took only a few weeks to see why Hamid had wisely given up his lease. The thing was a bust and I pulled out before Labor Day.

At this point I owned quite a bit of concession equipment and no place to put it. Getting the concessions on a circus was virtually impossible, so I turned to the carnival business. I framed a good looking popcorn and apple joint and a couple of hanky pank game



concessions and acquired a 26 foot semi trailer and a 1933 Diamond tractor. That tractor was a dandy. I had to keep a set of tools in the cab to get it over the road but it served the purpose.

I had some misgivings about how my wife would react to the carnival business, as she had been educated in a convent school. However she adapted beautifully and was completely supportive, not only then but throughout my career. We opened in 1950 in New England with the Paul Lacross Shows, a small carnival. We were doing reasonably well but after six weeks, Paul closed the show. We moved over to Eddy and Dolly Young's Royal Crown Shows. The popcorn and apples made money, but the games did not, so at the end of the season I scrapped the games and framed a girl show for 1951. We booked in 1951 on Johnny Denton's Gold Medal Shows. My wife ran the popcorn joint, on which we had the exclusive, and I operated the girl show.

Carnivals of 40 years ago were very different than today. Virtually all carnivals of that period carried a lot of grift in the form of flat joints. While a player might spend two dollars on a hanky pank game to win a paster doll worth fifty cents, the flat joints took in serious money. They were flashed with expensive merchandise but played strictly for cash. A player would normally lose twenty to fifty dollars and occasionally as much as a thousand or more.

Both Royal Crown and Gold Medal featured flat joints, but otherwise they were quite different. Royal Crown was a "fashion plate" show, with everything beautifully painted, all concessions spotless, every ride and show front brilliant with lights, and the midway carpeted with shavings. Gold Medal was more on the tacky side and carried two Gypsy mitt camps as well as a broad mob that rotated between the girl shows, features that would have been unthinkable on Royal Crown. Financially, however, we made out better on Gold Medal than on Royal Crown.

In the two years on these shows I never saw a single "hey rube" in spite of the amount of racket each car-



Bill English in the ticket box of the Hunt Bros. Circus side show in 1952. Pfening Archives.

ried. By contrast, I saw a number of fracasces on the Sunday School shows later trouped with. I recall, for instance, our drunks coming on the lot of Famous Cole in Oklahoma. One announced that he was Pretty Boy Floyd's nephew and yelled that they were "going to tear this show apart." Needless to say, they got pretty well battered up and ran bleeding to their car, promising to be back "with the difference." We figured this meant they would be back with guns. Since the show moved in the morning, Herb Walters had all the trucks parked in a circle after tear down, with the house trailers in the middle. It resembled the early settlers circling the wagons against an Indian attack. However, the four drunks never came back.

At the end of the 1951 season, I decided I had had enough of the carnival business. I sold off my equipment and signed with Hunt Bros. Circus as side

The Hunt Bros. Circus midway and bannerline in 1952.



show manager for 1952. It was a refreshing change.

The Hunt show, of course, was 100% Sunday School and enjoyed a fine reputation in its territory. The show generally ran a short season of 20 or 22 weeks, opening in April around Washington, D. C. and working its way up through New Jersey into New England and then back down to the Eastern Shore of Maryland. It did a consistent business. I don't recall any turnaways. I do remember, however, that we had 28 days of rain during the first 30 days of the 1951 season. Even so, the show played very few blanks.

I recall Charles T. Hunt, Senior, fondly as a gentleman and a fine traditional showman. He had no use for any "stool pigeon" who might come whining to him about some grievance or other. He took it as an insult and told them he knew how to run the show and when he needed advice he'd ask for it. He also was very defensive of his show and its people. I remember a couple of smart alecks coming up to him at the front door and asking "Where are the whores?" Old man Hunt looked them square in the eyes and snapped back "If you're looking for your mother and your sister, I haven't seen them."

The show was a family affair. Son Harry was the business manager and his wife sold tickets in the wagon. Sons Eddy and Charles, Jr. got the show up and down and over the road. There was no concession department as such. Each family member owned a different concession and had someone hired to run it. Bob Mills, a baritone player, had the band. Some of the acts on the show when I was there were the Conley Riding act, the DeRizkie Family, and Billy Barton with his cloud swing.

The backbone of the side show was the menagerie of seven elephants, a camel, and some cage animals. Roy Bush had the bulls, with one groom named "Shorty." I had several fire eaters at various times and for a while had a tattooed man until he got lost in a bottle.

Whenever I was short of acts I would go inside and do a little magic. I had



bought a guillotine illusion from Al Flosso, a former side show magician who had a magic shop at 34th and Broadway in New York. Most of the time, however, the inside was handled by Benny Bernard, a little Jewish magician from Coney Island. He did Punch and Judy and a magic act, featuring an excellent Miser's Dream coin routine. Benny was a character. He considered it going on the road to take the subway from Coney Island to Hubert's Museum on 42nd Street, but he liked the Hunt show because it never got too far away from New York. I used him years later on the Beatty side show, but he always quit when the route card showed we were going west of Harrisburg. That was the end of the world as far as Benny was concerned.

The Hunt show moved smoothly but it was a workhouse. The big top was a 90 with three 40's and the side show a 50 with two 30's. Both were bale ring tops with heavy wooden poles. All stakes were driven by hand. There was no spool wagon. All canvas had to be unrolled, laced and then unlaced and rolled at night and hand loaded onto a truck. In the two years I was there we never had a side show canvas boss so I also acted in that capacity with a "crew" of two or three men.

Following the close of one season I joined the Beers-Barnes Circus as banner man. They were headed south and had a few more weeks to go, and we were headed for Florida anyway. Beers-Barnes was a neat little show and a very friendly bunch of people to be around. Based on the size of the show and the size towns we played you couldn't get very much money for a banner, but it made a good fill in.

I returned to the Hunt show in 1953 as side show manager, but this year I also had the banners, which more than doubled my income. However, it did involve a lot of hustling. Each morning after getting the stakes driven, the poles raised, the canvas unrolled, laced and tied off to the bale rings, and the

top raised, I would leave the guying out and banner line to my helpers and would wash up, change clothes, and dash into town to sell. Because of time limitations, I concentrated on just one major deal--the car banner, for which we normally got \$100. We didn't have enough clowns to work the clown car gag, but we displayed the car on the midway and then brought it into center ring during the show, at which time I got on the mike and made a strong sales pitch for the car and the dealer. I generally was able to sell the deal in two out of three towns we played.

For the 1954 season I signed with the old Kelly-Miller show. Dick Scatterday had the national ads and the banners, but had suffered a stroke and though he did come on the show a couple of times during the season, he was really unable to travel. He had three national tie-ups that he wanted protected, one with Chevrolet, one with Frigidaire, and one with Red Goose Shoes. We worked out a deal where I would take the local banners and in return would keep an eye on his national ads.

Dick's national tie-ups were impressive. At 10 each morning Pinky Barnes would drive a Red Goose float to the local dealer's store, accompanied by Louis Grebs playing a truck-mounted air calliope. They would park at the store for an hour and the first ten kids to buy a pair of Red Goose shoes would get a free circus ticket. Then at 11 o'clock Frank Wiseman would drive the Frigidaire wagon, pulled by a six-horse hitch, to the local dealer. The wagon carried a polar bear and also a Frigidaire refrigerator and a freezer. Guy Smuck, who had the connection ticket box, would stand on the sidewalk to answer questions and keep kids from sticking their hands into the bear cage. Then at noon Freddy Logan would take the entire elephant herd to stand in front of the local Chevrolet showroom for an

Dick Scatterday's Frigidaire downtown promotion on Kelly-Miller in 1954. Pfening Archives.

hour. The overall effect was as good as a street parade and the show was paid directly by the respective manufacturers. To top it off, each dealer generally ran a half-page or quarter page ad in the local paper advertising the event. The layouts for these ads were furnished by the show and actually told more about Kelly-Miller than about the dealer's product.

All I had to do in connection with these national ads was to visit each dealer before I left town to get him to sign a statement about how much he liked the promotion. This was usually very easy--though an occasional Chevrolet dealer would mumble about the elephant smell left around his dealership.

My routine was to leave the lot in the afternoon, drive to the next town, find a place to park our trailer, and scout out which local businesses were exclusive dealers for certain products, such as paint, roofing, Purina animal feed, and so forth. The banner sales pitch involved each dealer to get an exclusive ad for his product. For example, a paint banner would be lettered "Such-and-such Paint Used Exclusively on All Circus Equipment" followed by the name of the local dealer. Based on whatever dealer bought the ad our equipment was painted each day by a different brand. The dealer got two banners, one at each end of the tent, for \$12.50. The Purina dealer, however, paid \$25 because a special announcement was made during the hippo walkaround that the animal was fed exclusively on Omaline. We did have one no-cash trade-out ad for Wyler watches, which were widely advertised at the time as being "unbreakable." This involved Freddy Logan bringing in an elephant, setting the watch on a bull tub, and having the elephant step on it. Naturally the soft pad on the bottom of the elephant's foot prevented any damage to the watch. Instead of cash we got to keep the watch. We wound up with a lot of watches so at the end of the season, after all involved parties got all the watches they needed, we held a watch sale in the lobby of the Webb Hotel in Hugo.

I normally would sell eight to ten banners a morning by getting on a pay phone with a roll of dimes. A member of the band was standing by to run and collect payment, after which we would hustle to the lot to get the banners painted and hung by show time. The painting was done by Larry Carlton, one of the performers, who, fortunately, was a fast worker. During the last few weeks of the season the





24-hour man blew, so I also doubled in that capacity.

Hugo was certainly different from the East and so was the territory the show played, which included a lot of Wyoming, Montana and North Dakota. You could park your trailer at the City Trailer Park just behind the Webb Hotel for \$16 a month, including lights. You could get a ribeye steak, potatoes and a vegetable for 95 cents at a Greek restaurant nearby.

Hugo was a close-knit and very friendly town. In addition to Kelly-Miller, Jack Moore's Tex Carson show and Herb Walters' Famous Cole show wintered there. When the shows came in off road, the local merchants would have a huge banner strung across Main Street welcoming them back. The soil in that part of Oklahoma was not conducive to highly profitable farming or ranching. The nearby Choctaw Indian reservation may have injected a little cash and there was much talk about someone bringing a glove factory to town which would provide 100 jobs. I don't know if this ever took place, but I do know that a lot of people used to drive the 25 miles to Paris, Texas, to shop because Texas had no sales tax. Actually, the circuses were Hugo's main industry.

At that time, Obert, Kelly and Dory Miller were all alive and active. Obert set the policy, Kelly handled the business end and Dory moved the show. The Kelly-Miller show had five rings but a narrow top, about a 90 with numerous middles. Someone once said it resembled a cigar. And of course it carried a lot of animals. Terrell Jacobs had several acts in the steel arena, which was in center-ring and left up throughout the performance. Among the performers were Grace McIntosh and Tommy Bentley, each of whom later became big-time circus producers.

Obert Miller was a spry little man with a keen business sense and a thorough knowledge of his territory. His policy was to dazzle the natives in small towns with the size of the show, keep prices low, and provide plenty of opportunities for the patrons to spend money in relatively small amounts which, of course, added up. The show moved in the morning and all trucks were routed to traverse the main street of the next show town. This sometimes involved having the trucks pass the lot and circle back. I remember having breakfast in a coffee shop in one town as the show trucks rolled by. The cashier was telling everyone that she had "counted 100 already."



Kit English making candy apples on Famous Cole in 1956. She also sold big show tickets.

Obert was not much for big salaries but if you worked on percentage he didn't care how much you made—the more the better. Even there, however, he was shrewd. Ione Stevens had the candy stands—on percentage, of course. However, her commission was based on the concession net rather than the gross to encourage her to keep a close watch on the bottom line.

After the close of the 1954 season, Dory Miller suggested I take out an animal unit to play schools. The unit consisted of two semis, one panel truck, two black working men and the animals, which included a lion, a tiger, a brown bear, a polar bear, a camel, a llama, a Zebu bull, some monkeys, a tapir and some other animals. My wife worked ahead booking the schools and I handled the unit. We generally made at least two schools a day. Each school kid paid 25 cents in advance to a teacher who turned the money over to me on arrival. The kids were brought out in groups and I gave a lecture on the animals. On weekends we would sidetail the exhibit at a Farmer's Market and charge a 25 cent admission.

We made a living with it for a few weeks but Dory didn't make out too well, since both semis blew their motors during the tour and the tapir died. I knew the tapir was ailing and called a local vet who didn't even know what a tapir was. When the animal died, I instructed my two working men to put the carcass in the panel truck, take it down by the Sabine River bottom and bury it. They apparently decided it was too

much work to bury it, so they just dumped it. The next day it was found by some hunters and the following day the headlines of the Dallas papers read "Unknown Prehistoric Beast Found in East Texas." It took a day or two for zoologists to determine that the "beast" was a tapir, which they said had "probably escaped from a zoo." Needless to say, I kept very quiet about where the tapir had come from.

That winter I closed a deal to take over the concessions on Herb Walters' Cole show for 1955. I was to furnish my own equipment, help and transportation and pay Herb 25% of the gross. To show you how Hugo was in those days, I walked into the Hugo State Bank and told the president that I had the concessions with Herb Walters and needed \$1,000 for some stock and equipment. Without further ado he gave me the money.

We opened a long season at Clarks-ville, Texas. One thing I had to buy was a 3 K.W. Oman light plant, since Herb lighted the show with a war surplus DC light-plant that would have burned up any concession equipment plugged into it. I believe he had a small AC plant for the organ, which was played by Leona Hill. Her husband, Breezy, was the general agent and Bill and Jackie Wilcox handled the billing. My wife sold tickets in the wagon, Helen Walters handled the front door, and Charley Rex, who was married to Herb's daughter, was the show mechanic and also handled the elephants. Ted LaVelda managed the side show, which had a very good assortment of animals. We made some money, repaid the bank early and added some equipment as we went along. I had gotten my tentage free from the Coca Cola company but needed to buy some other items.

Herb Walters was a pleasant, easy-going man. A former tent rep showman, he had played the Toby characters with his Walters Comedians and occasionally went in to sing along with the organ during the performance. However he sometimes had difficulty coping with the crises that are routine with a tent circus. He kept taking Tums to quiet his stomach and must have consumed a carload during a season. We returned to the show for a second season in 1956 but at the close Herb informed me that Ross McKay, his brother-in-law, was to have the concessions in 1957. I had spent two very pleasant seasons with Herb. I sold my equipment to Ross and





Part of Bill English's Chevrolet banner deal on the Clyde Beatty Circus in Philadelphia in 1957.

started to shop for a new connection.

Except for the Hugo shows and a couple of others, 1956 had been a rough year for circuses. The King show had split into two units and both went broke. The Beatty show was bankrupt after a few weeks on the road. Then in July John Ringling North closed Ringling-Barnum and announced to the world that "the circus as we know it is a thing of the past." The bright spot in all this was the revival of the Beatty show and its highly successful fall tour under new management. I signed to handle the banners and national ads for 1957 with the Clyde Beatty Circus (the Cole Bros. title was added later).

During its short 1956 run the concessions on the Beatty show had been operated by Frank McClosky and Walter Kernan, under the supervision of long-time associate Bob Reynolds. As most of our readers know, McClosky

The personnel of the English-managed Beatty-Cole side show in 1960. Pfening Archives.



and Kernan were former Ringling-Barnum executives who had joined that show in the 1920s as prop hands and worked their way up the ladder to top management only to be dumped by John Ringling North in his 1955 shake-up of the show. I have always felt that this shake-up contributed to the closing of the Ringling show under canvas in 1956.

McClosky and Kernan had outmaneuvered Sportservice, a national company that had operated the Beatty concessions for several years. Like Sportservice, they had advanced money to get the show on the road. This had been a standard procedure with this show. I understand the amount was around \$20,000, though I have never known if this was an advance against percentage or a flat fee for the season. If it was a flat fee it certainly wasn't a good deal for the circus. In any event they took a second mortgage on the show to protect themselves. However, Art Concello had a first mortgage of what I think was about \$50,000 and of course was senior to their claim.

When the show folded, the three men conferred about taking it over and re-

opening, but could never reach agreement on the details. Concello intended to go ahead on his own. At this point, McClosky and Kernan obtained additional financing from wealthy dog track owner Jerry Collins and Sarasota attorney Randolph Calhoun and paid off Art's mortgage before he had a chance to foreclose. They were now sole owners of the Beatty rail show.

They hired Floyd King as general agent and made a very successful fall tour. Concello got his money but not the show. Whether true or not, it was believed at the time that they got their entire investment back on that short tour.

Floyd King had a traumatic year in 1956. After his show went broke, he joined the Ringling show only to have it fold almost immediately. He then joined the Beatty show, where he remained for many successful seasons until age forced his retirement.

When I went to winter quarters in December, the train was still on the siding. There had been some discussion among the partners whether to add ten cars to the train and run it over the Ringling show route or to motorize it. The decision, of course, was to go to trucks, which involved a lot of hustling to get ready for an April opening. The ticket wagon body was remounted on a truck chassis, the water wagon-boom truck was retained, the Caterpillar tractors were sold. The train was sold for scrap and the James E. Strates Shows bought most of the wagons, which were of all-steel construction and in very good shape. I was in quarters the day that the Strates flat cars eased onto the siding to load the wagons.

A nationwide search was conducted to obtain semi trailers. One idea that didn't work was to use a car carrier as a pole wagon. As soon as it was loaded it broke in half. Car carriers do not have an under frame. A fleet of tractors was obtained from Cox Chevrolet in Bradenton, Florida, financed by GMAC. This type of financing required dealer-recourse. When the papers were signed, old man Cox is reported to have said "My God! I'm now in the circus business."

Paul Fisher, a veteran concession man from the Ringling show, was hired to reframe the concession department. Paul dated back to George Christy's Lee Bros. Circus. When he asked about money, McClosky told him "Paul, anyone can frame a concession department with money. The trick is to do it without money."

The year 1957 was a tough one in which to sell national ads, since North had proclaimed to the world that the



circus was dead. However, I did get a few, including Richfield Oil, Armstrong Tires, and Proctor and Gamble for their Big Top Peanut Butter.

I put the souvenir program together, wrote all the articles, and did the layout. Harry Anderson at Enquirer Printing in Cincinnati handled the printing. I ghost-wrote one article over the name of Mickey Spillane, a popular detective story writer who had worked with Beatty on the movie *Ring of Fear*. Of course I had to submit it to his agent for approval, which I received and the piece went in the program.

The show opened at Deland, Florida, then took a day off to jump to Charleston, South Carolina and then moved up quickly through the south to the New York area. The first really big business came on a two-day stand on Staten Island. The authorities would not permit the show to erect the top, so



Giant Buck Nolan and Magician Benny Bernard on the Beatty-Cole side show in 1960.

it was side walled. Business was terrific and continued good from there on. I generally worked two or three days ahead of the show selling local banners, particularly the clown car deal. My best score was a \$1,500 sale to a Chevrolet dealer for the one-week Philadelphia stand. After the close of the season I worked a few phone promotions for the show. This was my first and last experience in this line of work. I found it boring and tedious.

That winter, McClosky asked me to take over the side show for 1958, which spot I held down for four seasons, through 1961. In 1958 the side show still had an old canvas banner

line. In addition to the animals, I had Carlos Leal, fire eater, and Henry and Sandra Thompson with a number of inside acts. The Thompsons left later in the season and I replaced them with Charley Roark doing vent and Buck Nolan as the giant.

The following winter the show was now prospering and underwent a complete face-lift, including new canvas and a beautiful panel front for the side show. It opened out both horizontally and vertically and was painted by a great master banner painter, Snapp Wyatt, in Tampa. Among the performers who were with me consistently were giant Buck Nolan, sword swallower Alex Linton, and Jelly Roll Rogers with a small band and minstrel show, plus tattooed lady Betty Broad-bent. In 1959 the side show doubled its gross from 1958.

For the big spring dates at Commack, Long Island; Palisades Park and Philadelphia we augmented the side show. I made a deal with Dick Best, who had the side show on Royal American Shows, to borrow some acts for this period, including Hoyt Schumaker, armless and legless wonder and Emmett and Percilla Bejano (the Alligator Skin Man and the Monkey Girl).

Trouping on the Beatty show was a real pleasure. Business was usually good and the show moved like clockwork. Frank McClosky and Walter Kernan had quite different management styles. McClosky tended to stay in the office wagon or his trailer with an eye on the paper work. Kernan tended to be out on the lot checking for details. If a single flag was missing or a side pole was crooked, he would have it fixed. They both would stay on the show through the Philadelphia date, after which one would leave for a few weeks and return to let the other leave. Day-to-day management was handled by veteran showman Frank Orman, who also took care of the front door.

On a couple of very rare occasions



Jelly Roll Rogers, second from left, and his Beatty-Cole side show band in 1960.

when all three had to be absent, I served as acting manager. However, the show would have moved just as well with or without me because of its great staff. Theo Forestall and Walter Rairden were in the office wagon along with Edna Antes. Bill Webster was concession boss; Tommy Clark, the props; George Werner, the big top; and Tom (Kilowatt) Fitzpatrick, the lights. All were Ringling show veterans. Red Maynard had the side show canvas.

The butchers put up the long side grandstand and performers the short side. Actually, the butchers could have moved the whole show. The late Johnny Walker was boss butcher and others included Pete Prantz, Cole Show (Gabby) Joe, Rodrigues, Matches, Iowa, the Deacon and a number of others whose names have slipped my mind. Up until he had to retire because of a stroke, Bob Reynolds, former Ringling prop boss and a great showman, was on the show as general superintendent.

The Sells & Gray Circus ticket office and concession semi in Coatesville, Pennsylvania 1962. Pfening Archives.







The Sells & Gray midway in Coatesville, Pennsylvania in 1962. Pfening Archives.

Louis and Anna Gustov had the inside novelties and Jake Besser and his wife the outside novelties. Both had come from the Ringling show, had never been on a truck show before, and, of course, had bought trailers. Jakey, who was hard of hearing, always had a hard time trying to back up his trailer. His wife would stand outside the car and give him rapid-fire directions. Someone asked Jakey how he managed to follow all those directions without getting confused. "It's simple," he answered. "I just turn off my hearing aid."

Following the close of the 1959 season, Floyd King asked me to go to Canada and contract the Beatty show's 1960 route there. Neil Berk was the show's main contracting agent but for health reasons felt he could not handle the Canadian winter. Accordingly, in January of 1960 I drove to St. Catharines, Ontario, and in the next eight weeks set the thirty days the show would be playing there in 1960, including Toronto and Montreal. The weather was cold, of course, and I got snowed in twice and had to leave my car temporarily and move on by train. I was to return to all these towns that summer as side show manager.

The Sells & Gray hippo semi-trailer in 1965. Pfening Archives.



During the 1960 season, Walter Kernan discussed with me the idea of putting out a small show under my management. The partners had absorbed and enlarged Bob Snowden's Duke of Paducah Circus and were putting it out as King Bros. Circus with Bob

as manager and part owner. We formed a corporation for that purpose titled Kit Circus Operating Company. Walter Kernan had suggested that name because my wife's name was Kit.

After the close of the Beatty show's 1960 season, we put together an experimental show for an eight-week Florida tour that winter. The equipment was all Beatty stuff, with the title painted out. I am not sure whether it was I or Floyd King who thought of the title, but it was Sells & Gray.

Most of the personnel for that winter tour was from the Beatty show, with a few additions such as Charley Roark as side show manager and Wayne Newman as equestrian director. Victor Gaona and his family did trampoline, slack wire, web and a casting act. They were not long out of Mexico and had not yet developed their famous flying act. Bill Brickell had his poodle act on the show. The tour was a success and at its close the equipment reverted to Beatty to be readied for the 1961 tour.

I continued as Beatty side show manager in 1961 while we made plans for launching a full-scale Sells & Gray in 1962. Kit Circus Operating was capitalized at \$15,000, with Kernan, McClosky and I each putting in \$5,000. Of course, even at that time this was not enough money to build a complete new circus.

However, we had access to Beatty surplus, we had virtually unlimited bank credit, and Johnny Canole of Miami furnished all the trucks on credit. In addition, McClosky and Kernan lent personal funds to the corporation.

I started the work of framing the new show in Deland right after the close of the 1961 Beatty tour. Everything had to be built from scratch, including poles, seats, ring curbs, lighting system, cookhouse and the truck fleet. Bill

Mitchell, a great mechanic who had been with Luke Anderson, framed the spool wagon. I bought a light plant from Hunt Bros. Circus, and a camel from a defunct game park. I bought semi-trailers and hardware in Orlando and Tampa. We had acquired three elephants from R. A. Miller in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, late in 1961, and I bought a lion from Bill Mitchell's animal park in Sarasota. A side show panel front was framed on two of the semis by a welding shop in Deland and painted by Snapp Wyatt. All rolling stock was beautifully painted and decorated by Roger Boyd. This, of course, is only a partial list of what had to be done.

In previous years the Beatty show had played Easter Week at the Long Island Arena in Commack, followed by an engagement at Palisades Park. For 1962 it was decided to cover both dates simultaneously. The Beatty show was to play the Long Island date indoors and the Beatty big top, seats, and road equipment was to go into Palisades Park under the title of Sells & Gray and King Bros. Combined. Actually, no King equipment was used. The object was to win the usually lucrative Easter Week business in both spots.

Walter Kernan lined up a strong talent array for the Palisades Park date, including the Wallendas, Chet Juscyk's cat act, the Dorchester riding act, a flying act, all the acts scheduled for the Sells & Gray regular tour and many others. Karl Wallenda assisted in the performance direction. We opened with the Beatty elephants but when they moved over to Commack, we had Bill Woodcock's and Oscar Cristiani's elephants to replace them.

At the close of the Palisades Park engagement, the Beatty show reclaimed its equipment and moved on to its regular route. Sells & Gray did likewise and went to Phoenixville, Pennsylvania for the start of a tour that lasted until a November closing in Venice, Florida. The first few weeks of the Sells & Gray tour were a little hectic. Red Maynard had been hired as boss canvasman but blew before the show even left Palisades Park. I replaced him with Corky Clark, who also blew. Cy Murray had the cookhouse and Dee Aldrich opened as side show manager. Both also blew. Circus people were more plentiful then than today and we quickly replaced the cook and Chuck and Leah Fuller came on to handle the side show.

The most important addition to the staff was Paul Hudson, who came over from the Mills show a short time into the season and acted as general super-



intendent, assistant manager and, when necessary, big top boss canvasman. Paul stayed with the show for six straight seasons, through 1967, and was a valued right hand man. He later became assistant manager of Ringling Blue.

Of course a number of the original staff made the full season, including Frank Dailey on elephants, band leader Ramon Escorcia and mechanic Bill Mitchell. John and Lena Cloutman in the office wagon not only made the season but stayed on for six years and did a great job.

One obscure but valuable employee was Sig Wurnisch, who joined the show as a first-of-May when we played his sooty little home town in western Pennsylvania early in 1962. He joined on the big top but two weeks later I made him side show boss canvasman. Sig was an unemployed coal miner and a hard worker. At the end of each season he would take the bus back home and in the spring he would arrive in winter quarters ready to go again. He stayed with the show for six years. Sig drove the spool truck and we had to have a substitute driver one night a week. In the old coal miner tradition, Sig would get drunk after tear down on payday. The rest of the week he was sober as a judge.

In 1962 I engaged Art Miller as general agent. I had met him when I was with Kelly-Miller (Art was not related to the Miller family). Over there he booked seven towns a week, handled the contracting press, and stayed at least 30 days ahead of the show. However, Sells & Gray was a different ball game. Kelly-Miller at that time did not use sponsors. All Art had to do was secure a good lot at minimum cost and move on. Since most of the lots were outside city limits, no license was usually required. Art had a hard time booking sponsors and selling them on phone promotion and finally resigned in frustration. Floyd King came to the rescue and supplied contracting agents for the balance of the season.

In ensuing years I handled the general agent's job from back on the show most of the time, with Floyd King being involved part of the time. At one point, Charley Boas acted as general agent, until he had to resign for family reasons. Charley later owned and operated Circus Kirk, an all college student show. Glenn Parkins handled most of the Canadian booking.

Sells & Gray followed the Beatty policy of moving at night. The cookhouse truck generally pulled out about the time for the night show come-in, went to the next town, was spotted by the



Paul Hudson, general superintendent and assistant manager of Sells & Gray, 1962-1967.

24-hour man, and the cook and helpers set up the top and put in the tables. Instead of having to make do with a couple of doughnuts and a paper cup of coffee and having to work all morning until lunch time in the cookhouse, our crew sat down to a full breakfast before starting set-up. It helped keep working help. Of course there were other benefits. If a truck broke down, the mechanic had all night to get it repaired or towed in to be on time.

Everybody on Sells & Gray, myself included, ate in the cookhouse. I put special emphasis on this department and, although there were occasional lapses, it was very good 90% of the time. Breakfast was bacon and eggs or sausage and

Sword swallower Alex Linton and side show manager Stuart Miller on Sells & Gray in 1964.



eggs, or pancakes, or biscuits with sausage gravy. Lunch would be franks and beans, or ham hocks and beans with corn bread, or spaghetti. Dinner would be chicken, or beef stew, or pot roast, or ham and yams. Whenever fresh corn, tomatoes, or watermelon were in season, they were added to the menu. Our cost per person per day never ran over a dollar a day, not including the wages of the cook and helpers. Obviously, that would be impossible today. We normally fed about 65 people.

One season we featured a hippo in the side show. The animal had been owned by a man who tried exhibiting it on carnival midways. It came with an excellent semi with a big built-in tank. Now, as he found out, a hippo is a poor item to show on a carnival because, once in place, it can't be moved out to empty, flush and refill the tank. After two or three days it would smell so bad that no one would go near it, let alone spend a quarter to see it. He had offered to give the hippo to a couple of zoos who turned it down, claiming they had no budget to feed it. I got the hippo and the semi for \$500. One Sunday I sent a driver with a tractor over to Stuart, Florida, to bring the hippo back to winter quarters at Oneco, Florida. In the middle of the afternoon I got a call from the DeSoto County Sheriff's Department informing me that they had the driver in jail and the hippo parked outside. The driver had stopped to pilfer a few oranges from a roadside grove and had been nailed by a deputy for petty theft. They wanted me "do something about it." I jumped in my car, drove to Arcadia, squared the beef for \$50 and the hippo was again on its way. After a season on the show, I loaned the hippo to a South Florida game farm where they fed and



cared for it for having it to exhibit. Unfortunately, the hippo, which was pretty old anyway, died there that winter.

Stuart Miller managed the side show for several seasons and did a great job, as did the late Jackie Wilcox who, with a helper, handled the advance billposting. Two seasons we carried a cat act of five lions. The act was owned by Dave Hoover, but was worked very effectively by Johnny Golden. We had some great performers on the show during my years there. I especially recall Carmen Del Molino with wire and head-balancing trap; the Pedrolas with cradle, slide for life and wire act by daughter Sasha; the Lacey's with rolling globes; the Eddy Santiago riding act; the Droguett family with juggling and balancing; the Hall Family with dogs, bears, goats and unicycle acts; Bob and Marge Langin clowning; and Paul Hudson's wife Chris doing, web, ladder and elephants.

During our Canadian runs, Al Stencell used to butcher on the show. One season Jim Nordmark handled advance press and in 1967 Bill Garden was contracting for us. All three later became successful indoor circus operators.

Sells & Gray did not actually make a profit in its first season of 1962, but we paid off loans and recouped much of the cost of framing the show. The next four seasons were uniformly profitable. In all of these four seasons we did eight weeks a year in Canada to big business. In 1967 we did not go into Canada because of the World's Fair being held in Montreal. Our summer business that year was spotty, but we had an excellent fall.

The show went through a number of ownership changes. Originally it was owned equally by McClosky, Kernan, and myself. When Kernan died, his share went to his widow, who in turn sold it to Art Concello. Art introduced the idea of replacing live music on the show with canned music, which didn't thrill me but was economical. Art soon sold his share to McClosky, who wound up owning two thirds. The name of the operating company was, of course, still Kit Circus Operating Company, Inc.

I had a hernia that I had done nothing about for many years. I acquired it on the Hunt show push-

ing up a side pole. If you're short of help guying out a top, you slant the side poles inward, tighten the guy ropes as well as you can, and then tighten them further by pushing the side poles upright. We were playing Florence, South Carolina late in 1967 when the hernia became incarcerated. I got in my car and drove from the lot to a local hospital for emergency surgery. I was in the hospital for a week but Paul Hudson kept the show going.

I don't know if the surgery had anything to do with it, but I guess I was suffering from burnout at the time. I felt the show was stagnating, not going anywhere, not getting any bigger. Although a minor consideration I considered the canned music a step backward rather than forward. And I was not completely happy with the way money was divided. In any case I told McClosky I was getting out and turning my interest over to him. He asked me several times to reconsider. Looking back I have often felt I should have done so, because I really loved the tent show business.

In 1966 I had formed a separate company of my own, Greater American Entertainment Corporation. Initially the idea was to play some fall and winter dates to supplement my income and also to provide work for my phone promoters after the close of the circus season. Promoters tend to drift away if you don't keep them busy. At first I used Stuart Miller's magic show but in 1967 began using shows produced by Philip Morris under the title of the Wonderful World of Fantasy. I now proposed to devote full time to this operation.

Tommy and George Hanneford Sr. in front of one of Bill English's 24 sheet billboards in Canada in 1968.

I was not out of the circus business for long. During early winter of 1967, Glenn Parkins introduced me to Tommy Hanneford and suggested booking a few weeks in Canadian ice arenas for the Hanneford Circus. Tommy at that time had the nucleus of a show but had not really gotten it off the ground. I formed a new corporation called Circus Classics. The ice arena idea was a good one but offered a limited time window between when the hockey season ended, the ice was taken out, and before the ice was put back in for summer hockey and figure skating schools. Tommy furnished an excellent one ring show for a flat weekly fee and we did eight weeks in 1968 and eight more in 1969, but didn't make any money. We had a few big dates but too many small ones. In 1970, I cut the route to three weeks, playing only the best dates and showed a profit.

Tommy felt he couldn't live with the three week season, so we decided to expand to a three ring operation and invade the U.S. Tommy obtained a third interest in the corporation, putting in some equipment instead of cash and Art Concello became a silent partner.

This was not a "school house show" as we know them today. This was a major three ring show. Arenas were not a problem in Canada but were in the United States, which meant too many layoff days between show dates. Tommy Hanneford is to my mind the greatest circus producer in the world. He has always wanted everything to be perfect. He bought rolls of red carpet to blanket the track around the rings. When Concello saw the carpet being loaded he said "What the hell is that for--it isn't going to make any more money." However, it really did dress up the show, even though it was an expensive trimming.

Tommy furnished a package of acts--for a flat weekly salary, including the riding act, his wife Struppi's aerial act, and the leopard act. This salary had to be paid every week regardless of business. In some respects, I think Tommy saw himself as a hired performer rather than a partner. All the rest of the personnel were on the corporation's payroll. We operated on this basis for four seasons from 1971 through 1974,





losing money every year. Fortunately, Greater American Entertainment was doing well with the stage shows and pouring money into Circus Classics.

In 1974 I decided the show could not be turned around the way it was operating. I had an agreement with Art Concello that he would not be responsible for any debts or obligations beyond his initial investment. I figured my personal loss at just over \$100,000, including money drawn from Greater American plus obligations I still had to cover. I dissolved Circus Classic. Tommy went on to operate on his own, switching to Shrine show productions at which he is today a leader. I continued to operate the stage shows and by 1978 had pretty well cleared up my losses on Circus Classics.

In late 1977 I got a call from Frank McClosky wanting me to become general agent of the Beatty show. Frank wanted me to close down Greater American. I accepted the offer but told him I couldn't consider shutting down the profitable stage show business. I told him I would pay someone to handle the daily details but Greater American had to stay in business. As things turned out, this proved to be a wise move.

I found out immediately that I was not actually general agent of the Beatty show, since Tim Stinson and Doug Lyon were in complete charge of the show's advance and I had nothing to do with it. Apparently my job was to route and book the two smaller shows, King Bros. and Sells & Gray. Either through over-optimism or over-confidence, I figured this could be handled, even though we were getting a very late start in contracting. Both shows had very profitable tours in 1977, playing many sponsored dates that had been abandoned by the Beatty show when Beatty had shifted to playing unsponsored engagements, primarily adjacent to shopping malls. I assumed that these sponsors would repeat and provide a good nucleus of dates for 1978.

Unfortunately, a majority of these sponsors, for whatever reason, had believed they were getting the Beatty show under a different title. Although both smaller shows were good, sponsors complained bitterly about their size, number of elephants, seating facilities and so on. They had no intention of repeating. A couple even



Philip Morris, producer of the Wonderful World of Fantasy.

hung up on me abruptly when I phoned them and identified myself. This proved a tough hurdle to overcome and by late summer both shows, but especially Sells & Gray, were in booking trouble. McClosky, whose health was now declining rapidly, ordered both shows to close and probably to be shelved permanently. Not too long after, Frank McClosky passed away after making what was virtually a deathbed sale of his circus interests to Jerry Collins. Meanwhile, I was happy to return to running Greater American Entertainment.

During the 1980s I expanded Greater American to the point where we were playing up to 200 dates a year. The shows, produced by Philip Morris, had evolved from straight magic shows into story-line productions, including *The Magical Land of Oz*, *Snow White*, *Pinnocchio*, *Cinderella*, and *Popeye the Sailor*.

All of my three kids were brought up on the circus. When they became old enough to go to school, they and my wife would stay in Sarasota until school let out around Memorial Day, then come on the show for June, July and August, returning to Sarasota around Labor Day when school re-opened.

My older son, John, never really developed an interest in show business. He is now comptroller of a computer software company in Sarasota. My younger son, Bill, Junior, is an X-ray technician at Sarasota Memorial Hospital, but he is an avid circus fan. My daughter, Kathy, has stayed with the circus. She started doing web on the Hanneford show and later developed a nice single trap act under the tutelage of the great aerial star LaNorma Fox. Today she, her husband Oscar Garcia, and their three kids play mostly spot dates with their dog act, casting act, juggling

and Oscar doing the Wheel of Destiny.

Currently, at age 79, I am semi-retired. I say "semi" because I still operate Greater American Entertainment on a scaled-down basis from an office in my home, playing six to eight weeks a year with shows still produced by Phil Morris, with whom I have enjoyed a close business and personal relationship for 27 years. I keep in touch with the circus world by serving on the board of directors for the Annual Sarasota Circus Festival and Parade, for which I have handled the advertising and publicity for the past several years.

As I look back on a rather long career, I think my best years were spent in the tent show business. In spite of weather that could be bitterly cold or sweltering hot, storms, muddy lots, and daily crises, the tented circus was my greatest love.

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## The great Hartford fire July 6, 1944.

The cook house of the Ringling-Barnum Circus was about two blocks from the big top lot in Hartford, Connecticut. We were getting ready to serve supper and then tear down and move to Springfield, Massachusetts, the city that the circus would exhibit the next day.

There was not a breath of air stirring, when all of a sudden someone yelled fire. About that time you could hear the cracking of the fire as the sky became overcast from smoke and flying pieces of canvas and sparks.

I did not rush to the big top to see what it was all about as we would be needed in the cook house should sparks come our way. We would have to work fast to drop all our tents, the main dining room, kitchen, colored tent and other smaller tents. I did send most of my men to help wherever they might be needed.

The day after the fire all the local newspapers were high in praise of all the circus people, from workingmen to the artists, in their efforts to prevent or hold down panic. They assisted others in getting out of the big tent and were helpful in preventing the death toll from being higher.

As in all great disasters of the amusement world, the band played on until it was too hot. The big top canvas above their heads was ablaze and poles started to fall across the band stand.

There will always be controversy over what caused fire. Almost everyone seems to agree that the original flash of fire was small at first and could of easily have been put out with a single pail of water. But there it ends, no one was sure where the fire first appeared. The flames spread quickly, in less than twenty minutes the twenty of tons of "Big Bertha" was in ashes.

As long back as I can remember the mens' and ladies' rest rooms were always located in the connection between the menagerie and the big tent. The mens' had a small tent, which contained a toilet stool and urinal trough that was smack against the end of the big top side wall. There was a large apron that kept it from being visible by the people sitting on the top rows of the seats. Some people were of the opinion that someone threw a lighted cigarette against the

# THE CIRCUS STEWARD

## Part V

By John M. Staley

side wall of the big tent in the mens' rest room and that it lay there and smoldered. A little breeze came up and started the blaze that set the side wall afire and eventually caught the big tent afire.

Not being an expert on fires I still will not go along with the fire starting in the side wall. The side wall was not water proofed as was the big tent. I still claim that you can not start a fire with a cigarette. All it will do is sputter and go out. You would have to light it again. The big tent was a different story; it had been water proofed with wax and gasoline.

Prior to the Hartford fire all canvas tents used by the armed forces, all circuses, carnivals, chautauquas, and other outdoor attractions were water proofed with gasoline and wax. Fire proofing was never mentioned until the day after the Hartford fire.

There had been other circus fires, but they went along as if nothing had happened. The Barnum & Bailey Circus lost its big tent by a careless cigar smoker in Schenectady, New York on May 22,

The Ringling-Barnum Circus burning in Hartford, Connecticut on July 6, 1944. All illustration from the Pfening Archives.

1910. No one was killed, but there were some minor injuries. The Ringling-Barnum Circus lost their menagerie tent by fire in Cleveland, Ohio in August, 1942. Again no one was hurt or killed. That fire killed more than forty animals and damaged a number of cages.

The day of the fire in Hartford there was about a half house. If the fire had occurred in Providence, Rhode Island, the city before Hartford on July 4th the deaths would of been ten fold or more. The afternoon in Providence was hot and very dry, not a breath of air. It was a turnaway crowd. The ticket sellers had sold all their seat tickets and were high seating the people in the bleacher sections. The canvas hands were carrying in bales of hay and straw. Others were breaking the bales and spreading them in front of the reserved seats so that the late comers would have a place to sit. Finally, the police stopped the circus from selling any more tickets.

Many people still believe as I do that the five executives were railroaded to jail for one year for no good reasons. They were the scapegoats. The city of Hartford had to finger someone for the catastrophe, and do it quickly, without batting an eye. They picked the manager, the vice president, head electrician, boss canvasman and tractor foreman.

The Ringling-Barnum circus remained in Hartford for nine days after the fire before entraining to Sarasota, Florida, its winter home, to prepare to exhibit outdoors in ballparks, fair grounds and stadiums.

The Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus opened its tentless 1944 outdoor season in the Akron, Ohio Rubber Bowl and played this route: August 4-6, Rubber Bowl, Akron, Ohio; August 8-20, University of Detroit, Detroit; August 22-31, Soldiers Field, Chicago; September 1-4, Victory Baseball Park, Indianapolis; September 11, Fair Grounds in Milwaukee; September 12-13, Municipal Stadium, Davenport, Iowa; September 12-13, Fair Grounds, Des Moines, Iowa; September 15-16, State Fair Grounds, Lincoln, Nebraska; September 18-20, Rupert Stadium, Kansas City; September 21, State Fair Grounds, Topeka, Kansas; September 23-24, LaGrave Field, Fort Worth; September 25-27, baseball





park, Dallas; September 29-30, October 1-2, Buffalo Stadium, Houston; October 3, Stuart Stadium, Beaumont, Texas; October 5-8, Pelican Stadium, New Orleans.

#### The old time boss candy butcher.

On the large railroad circuses the workingmen would outnumber the performers, staff and other white collar positions. There were at least twelve to twenty different departments that employed workingmen. Ticket sellers did not like to be called workingmen, but they were listed on the cook house statement as ticket sellers department. Over the years these men have been the aristocracy of the working departments.

Next in prominence, at least in the old days if not now, on the cook house statement was the candy butcher department. To be a candy butcher or to operate one of the concession stands was a sign of success. Men were not hired every day as in other working departments. When men were chosen they were above the run-of-the-mill workingman. He had to be neat in appearance, ambitious, a steady worker, a good hustler and a gentleman at all times. Of course there was a bad apple every so often as in all walks of life. They use to say that you had to wait until someone died or was discharged to be hired as a butcher.

During the years I was coming up the ladder in the cook house I did not have any great desire to be a candy butcher, although I did work under Sid Ruben, Frank Shaffer and Leo Crook at times.

When anyone mentions a cook house steward the first name that usually pops out is "Ollie" Webb of the Ringling Bros. Circus, Charles Henry of the Barnum & Bailey show and of course "Laughing" George Davis of Cole Bros. and other circuses. There were other cook house stewards, but those three were tops.

So it was the same in the concession department, the names that stood out from all other boss candy butchers were Sid Ruben of the Ringling circus and Frank Shaffer of the Barnum & Bailey show. Shaffer was later on Ringling-Barnum. No doubt there were good men on other circuses, but these two were outstanding.

Ruben had the respect of all his men at all times. At times he was strict, but he was a just man and would go to bat for any of his men.

During the spring of 1918 circuses were feeling the shortage of workingmen in all departments. Anybody, if they had the time, could double in

"brass." The ringstock and elephant men would take the stock and elephants to the train, come back to the lot and help tear down the big top. The animal men, side show men, wardrobe, some of the porters if the train was nearby, candy butchers, ticket sellers, front door men, performers, even the ballet girls helped in other departments.

The Ringling-Barnum Circus was under canvas only a short while when it was decided to discontinue the grand street parade. In towns or cities where they were forced to parade they would send Johnny Agee, the equestrian director or ringmaster, downtown in a two horse surrey with Lew Graham to announce that the parade was cancelled due to the late arrival and shortage of labor. At times they sent along the elephants. But the circus performances would be on time.

The candy butchers had been putting the big top up and taking it down since opening under canvas. The circus management had furnished coveralls for the concession department, and the laundry tab was picked up by the concession department. The candy butchers had clean work clothes each morning.

The butcher's uniform consisted of a white jacket and a white box like hat. A card was attached to the front of the hat reading "25 cents, pay no more." The warning sign was really sort of a joke. The butchers bought their stock at a fixed price and then charged whatever the traffic would bear. When asked by a circus goer why they were being charged more than the sign read the answer would be: "that is the price outside the

Charlie Campbell in a Cracker Jack butcher's coat on Wallace Bros. Circus in 1937.



ternoon performance" if at night.

On smaller shows the butchers' white jackets were furnished to the show by concession suppliers. The Cracker Jack name appeared on many circus candy butchers. The Curtis Candy Company also furnished jackets reading "Baby Ruth."

The Ringling-Barnum circus did not make advertising arrangements with concession suppliers. The butchers there wore jackets with no advertising, but they sold plenty of boxes of Cracker Jacks.

One day the butchers were doing their daily Chinese labor of sacking peanuts between shows when Ruben walked into the supply tent, called out to John "Blink" Meek, wagon man in charge of the supply tent, to get all the stand men and candy butchers who were in the big stand to come to the candy top. After everyone had been rounded up, Sid made a short speech, thanking all the men for their cooperation in helping on the big top, morning and night so that the circus could move from town to town. He said he understood some of the men had grievances about doing all the hard labor for gratis. Then he remarked that he had just come from a visit with Charles Ringling in his private Pullman car, the *Caledonia*, where he and Mr. Ringling had a long and fruitful talk about the work that the candy butchers had been doing. Ringling told Sid it was deeply appreciated. Then Sid replied to Mr. Ringling that his men were carrying too much of a load, that the only day of rest was on Sunday. Between shows when the other departments were resting the butchers had to work until nearly time for the doors to open for the evening performance. It was a rush to freshen up for the come in, and shortly after to go on the seats vending their wares. After the big spectacle was over all the seat butchers would check in.

The men who sold peanuts, pop corn and Cracker Jacks would take out ice cream cones. The others would help to tear down the outside stand and then load the candy wagon. After the butchers had sold all the ice cream and their equipment was stored away on one of the big top wagons as the candy wagon had already been sent to the railroad crossing to be loaded on the flat cars. Then all the butchers would have to wait until the night performance was over before they could start to tear down the big top. Sid said that Mr. Ringling had agreed with him about the amount of work they had already done free and that starting the next day the candy

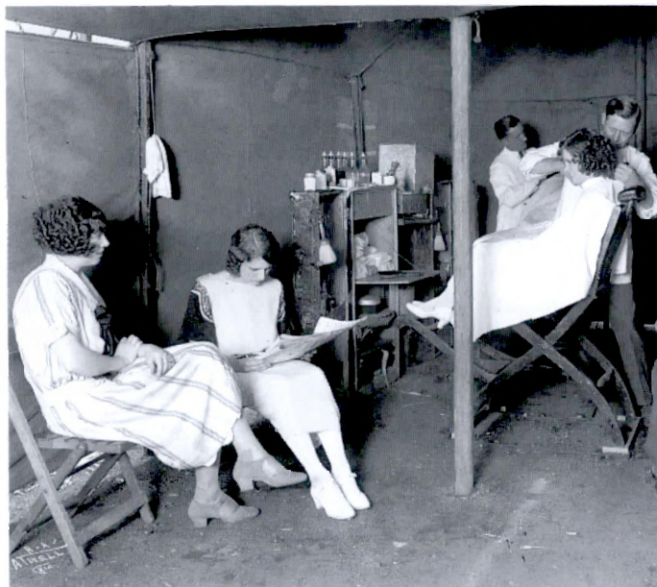


butchers would only have to help to put up the circus in the morning. You can imagine the cheers and whistles that came after that announcement.

During the World War One the Ringling circus never exhibited on Sunday, so it was a day off for most of the circus personnel. Ruben did not mind his men going to the hotel on their day off, but all candy butchers and stand men had to make the Sunday dinner in the cook house. Sid would always be sitting at his regular place at the staff table. The men had to pass his table to reach theirs. Anyone unlucky enough to miss Sunday dinner would get a stiff penalty come Monday. All you have to do is ask me. I know as I missed a couple of times. The one I dreaded most was being in jail in the big stand in the menagerie. You had to do all the regular work that the other men performed, besides staying on the big top canvas crew. Each day you worked in the stand for the two performances. Should you be a dry vendor you would miss out on the peanuts, pop corn and Cracker Jack, but you would take in ice cream cones after the spectacle.

We had a barber tent that was always located next to the front door of the cook house. At that time the tent had two folding barber chairs and most of the time two barbers. This may sound silly, but I believed that I was the Beau Brummel of the candy butchers. I was a darn good customer, as about every week or ten days I would get a hair cut, a singe, shave, massage and tonic. At times I was too lazy to give myself a fast shave with a safety razor. If there only one man ahead of me I would pay for his hair cut and take his place.

One day I ducked away from sacking peanuts and made a beeline to the barber shop, as I was going to have the "works" and would miss lunch in the cook house. When I arrived there were only three ahead of me, so I would not have to wait too long for my turn. I went all the way that day and was feeling like a new born baby. The barber was applying hot towels after the facial, so between hot towels I sort of looked around the row of wooden chairs, which were filled with customers awaiting their turn, when lo and behold I spotted Sid Ruben, my boss, awaiting his turn. One look was enough. I knew for sure I was in a jackpot, even though not one word was said the entire day about the barber shop. The next day between shows



The barber shop on the Ringling-Barnum circus in the 1920s.

John Meek called me over to the stock wagon and said that Ruben had remarked that the wagon was getting very dirty, and it would be a good idea to have John Staley give it a good massage between shows.

During the war year of 1918 bottled drinks were very seldom ever sold in the big top. We always had plenty of circus orangeade, called flukem on the show, but toward the end of the season it was hard to obtain the saccharine that we had been using as a sweetener. Along the way Ruben purchased some molasses to see if that could be used as a sweetener. I can truthfully say it was the biggest flop of the season. The seat butchers would only make one trip through the seats with the orangeade, as they feared someone would knock the tray out of their hand. I do believe we only used the molasses one day and one day only.

Ice cream was a big seller in the big tent at the afternoon performance. But for the night performance Ruben would only keep freezers of ice cream when the circus started at 8:15. The men in the big stand would tear it down and carry it out to the concession wagon to be loaded. They also would take down the outside stands and the supply tent. Meanwhile a couple of the butchers would carry two wooden jacks and a short counter board to the grandstand side of the tent to make a table under the grand stand seats. Others would bring over the two freezers of ice cream, some ice cream trays, ice cream cones and dippers. They also had a bucket of clear water to rinse the dippers. Meanwhile one of the boys from the electric light department would bring over a

lighted Coleman lantern. While all this was going on Ruben would set up shop.

The dry candy butchers who sold peanuts, popcorn and Cracker Jacks would check in just as soon as the show started. The wet men would sell their tray of drinks. They too would check in under the grand stand. Then Ruben would have the ice cream dipper fill one tray of twenty cones. Then he would put the tray of ice cream cones up for bids, the highest bidder would buy the tray. All the other trays would go for the same price. You either sold the cones or gave them away. There was no returns or refunds.

In the menagerie tent the wild animal cage wagons were spotted on one side and the elephants staked out on the other. The seal cages were on each side of the connection into the big tent. In the center of the menagerie between the center poles on one end the big candy stand was located. There were three wagons of giraffes, then on a picket line were zebras, camels, little mules and other lead animals.

Ruben would purchase cases of small bottles of Welch's grape juice. The only stand that sold grape juice was the connection stand that was used between shows by the circus personnel, as the big stand was closed. Every so often I watched Ruben open a bottle of grape juice and give it to one of the animals on the picket line. The animals knew Sid and when he started toward them with grape juice they would stomp around and knead ground. Some would have their mouths open waiting for the grape juice.

Ruben was more like a father to me than a boss man. If he had not suddenly passed on to the big lot in the sky during the early part of that winter, he had planned on taking me to Florida when he was ready to leave Barnaboo.

Frank Shaffer of the Barnum show was another good boss candy butcher, but he did not have the easy going disposition of Ruben. He was a money and more money man. I do believe at times he would talk of money in bed. He was also a very strict man to work under. He would allow his men to make an extra nickel on the merchandise they sold on the seats. He did not have any use for a shirker and it would not take him any time to replace one. Each and every man who worked under Shaffer had to show re-



sults. It was this way from the start, so the men did not have any complaints.

Here is an example. The Ringling-Barnum circus was showing in the old Madison Square Garden downtown between 26th and 27th Streets. Andrew Striker and I were vending brick pop corn, "all colors and all flavors." When you opened the brick it was all white inside. While going through the gallery I stopped to chat with a nice young girl. Before I knew it I had forgotten all about selling pop corn. Andy was pushing his pop corn which made me nervous as I had not sold my first box. So I gave my box to the lady who was operating the ladies room. I went down and paid for the first box and picked up another, then back to my girl friend in the gallery. Andy came along and I asked him how many boxes he had sold. He said he was on his third, so I took the unsold box of fifty bricks and gave it to the lady attendant. I went down and paid for the unsold box and was checked out with another box.

To make a long story short, I did the same thing all over. I gave the full box away. By that time the afternoon performance had started. I waited until the spectacle had wended its way around the hippodrome track and out of the arena. The side show folks had started to walk into the center ring to be introduced. This was also time for all the dry vendors to check in and then take out trays of ice cream cones. My little flirtation that afternoon cost me fifteen dollars, less my commission. This was only one example of what occurred while working under boss candy butcher Shaffer.

In other words you had to produce or get away from the concession department. If I had checked in that afternoon after only selling a part of one box and Striker had sold four or five

boxes, Shaffer would have been hot as a pistol. At times the butchers would find a "hot spot" and jump way out in sales. But as a rule there was very little variation in the amount each vendor sold. Some days there were six or eight men on peanuts, so maybe the high man might sell one basket more than one of the other men. The same was true with pop corn and Cracker Jack.

We had a candy butcher who used to set up a card table in the Garden and make a nice display of one pound boxes of choice chocolates put out by Park and Tilford of New York City. I have forgotten the butcher's name. The few old timers that I have asked or written to said they did not know his name. About a half hour after the doors at each performance had been opened this man would bring a case of chocolates into the arena. He would take out six or eight boxes of chocolates, push the case off the aisle and then would take a look at the sections of seats on both sides of the aisle he was going to work. Slowly he would start up the steps, always picking out young couples if possible. Then he would "mitt" a box of chocolates into the lap of a girl or young lady. If she tried to give it back he would keep going up the steps very slowly. He would follow the same procedure until he reached the last row. He would then return to the first row from the aisle and start to collect from the men. He also did this slowly. Should he make a sale off the first couple then he had it made all the way

The main candy stand in the Ringling-Barnum menagerie in 1922.



Butchers line up to fill their trays in the Ringling-Barnum concession supply tent in 1922.

to the last row. Then he would move over to the next aisle and start all over again until he had made a complete circle of the arena and box seats. He never went to the mezzanine or gallery sections of the Garden. He only sold the Park and Tilford choice chocolates in the Garden.

Just before the Ringling-Barnum Circus opened its 1920 season in the Garden the candy butchers had a morning call in the basement. Shaffer was late, the men were all standing or sitting on boxes that belonged to the animal department. They were on pins and needles not knowing if they had a job. Shaffer and "Pop" Ferns, his assistant, walked into the room as the men opened an aisle for them. Shaffer looked around the room, pointed his finger and said to a man, "you, you, out." That was the end to that man for that year. Ferns, should he have a liking for one of the men dismissed, would at the time change Shaffer's "out."

Before we leave the old Garden I would like to relate a story about the free circus performance that was given each year by the circus management for the crippled, blind and poor children of New York City. The morning circus performance would start roughly around ten o'clock. Buses would start to arrive soon after eight, sometimes sooner. By the magic time of ten the huge Garden would be over swollen with children of all nationalities. In those distant years it seemed everybody connected with the Ringling-Barnum Circus would be on hand early to help carry in the crippled children or help the blind and less fortunate boys and girls. To watch some of our workmen to whom you never gave a glance or a spoken word before carrying some little girl or boy in his arms would start a little trickle of





tears from your eyes. Most of the performers would make the free show. But some of the "stars" would not appear, whether it was on account of no pay or too early to arise I will never know. At any rate the performers, workmen and others who were needed to put on the performance were lavishly repaid by the children in their hand clapping and their wild shrieks of laughter and approval of every act, no matter if it was one of the big stars or one of the roving clowns.

Our boss candy butcher would give generously in refreshments. The butchers would work as usual. All items went for ten cents and they would receive their usual commission. To be truthful very few of the butchers ever sold the first bag of peanuts, pop corn or Cracker Jacks. They were so filled with enthusiasm after watching the kids who were so eager to see everything with only two eyes, when they needed four or six. Even the blind were having the time of their little lives.

#### John Dillion Cook House Waiter

John Dillion had been a cook house waiter for "Ollie" Webb on the Ringling Bros. Circus for an unknown number of years.

Only a very few persons knew his given name. I happened to be one; George Butts was his real name. Tall tales were told that he was a notorious gambler around the turn of the century in the badlands of Sioux City, Des Moines and Fort Dodge, Iowa. In earlier times there had been posters with his picture on them in law enforcing offices.

I met John in the spring of 1919 in the cook house. I had the big top band table and he had front door men and ticket sellers, one of the better money tables. John must have been reaching 70 years of age at that time. He did not have a hair on his head. Every day he would rub olive oil into his skull. He always used cold water and a bar of soap to shave, never would use a mirror. At no time would he pose for a

snap shot or a group photo.

We arrived in Philadelphia on a bright sunny day in May. To be exact it was Sunday May 4th, 1919. We were to exhibit there for the entire week. Sunday evening John asked if I would usher for him while the circus was in Philadelphia. I told him I would be glad to earn the extra money as I was working for love on the big top band table. They were the worse tippers in the entire cook house.

Monday afternoon I went to the wardrobe tent to get my usher's uniform. Upon entering the big top I did not have any trouble understanding how the numbers of the seats corresponded with the ticket stubs. I had a piece of chalk that I used to number the rows. John was the only cook house man on the grand stand side. He had section "H" and half of section "G." Even on a sell-out house there were always chairs vacant. They were held for any of the Ringlings or their friends, VIP guests, or important people of the press. It was also for "squawks" like a child falling through the bleacher seats or getting hurt in a jillion other ways around the circus. Injured spectators would be rushed to the doctor's tent and given first aid. In the meantime someone would be sent to the front door for Frank Cook, the legal adjuster. If it was a child the doctor would send over to the candy top for Cracker Jacks, ice cream cones or anything in the food line that would appeal to a child. As soon as Mr. Cook came upon the scene he would be fluttering around like a chicken with his head cut off. There was method in his madness. The main thing he wanted was the parent's name on a release paper. After the paper was sealed and signed he would then take the entire party over section "H" and give them front row seats.

I was going along fine as an usher until the latter part of the week when I had a run in with Roy Dehaven, head usher for all seats in the big top. As with everything else around the circus

The Ringling-Barnum usher department in 1922.

the ushers had a thing going for them. The regular ushers always had to check the chairs in their section just before the circus doors opened. They also were doing their "lapping" of chairs. By so doing they would gain one chair in each row. The chairs were made of wood and folded into a compact small space. As the chairs were opened the two back legs extended to form a back rest.

For instance in Philadelphia the reserved seats always sold out first, as it seemed everybody wanted to sit in the center so they would not miss any of the feature acts. At both the afternoon and night performances it was not unusual to have straw houses, the people sitting on straw around the hippodrome track. You can rest assured most of them were in the market for a chair in the center of the big top.

That is where the extra chairs came in handy. We had them for a price. Our prices were on a sliding scale, never less than two dollars a chair. We would go as high as five dollars. It did not take any time to sell our eighteen chairs.

The seat men were given so many sections of seats to erect. They would line up the jacks and stringers with a straight line. Then men would come behind and raise the jacks. Then others would raise the stringers, before you knew it the grandstand had been erected and other men were opening the chairs and setting them in rows. The seat men were held responsible for their section of seats. During the circus performance no one except the seat men could go under the grandstand. The seat men charged one dollar each a day for any number of extra chairs they wanted.

One night just before they called out "doors," the signal that the front door was to be opened for people to come into the menagerie and then the big top, I met my Waterloo. Roy Dehaven, as was customary before each performance, was inspecting all the sections of the reserved seats. He passed my section. Then all of a sudden he turned around and came over to where I was standing. He said I would have to take out all of the extra chairs. I told him I was only helping John Dillion, and that I did not put the chairs in the aisles and did not know anything about the darn chairs. I told him if he wanted to have the chairs removed he would have to get someone else to do it as I was through. With that I walked out of the big top. That was the end of my ushering experience and also the end of my fifteen dollars for the chairs.





1895

Willie Sells left Topeka on March 8, 1895, for Denver, where his show and his partner J. N. Rentfrow had spent the winter. He hoped to have his show on the road about April 1.

"It is stated that Sells' circus cleared nearly \$20,000 last summer," according to the *Topeka State Journal* of March 9. "It is known that his account at the Central National bank amounted to five figures, and besides this he had a big 'roll' in a chamois-skin pouch which he carried suspended about his neck underneath his shirt. At least that is what his friends say."

The *Topeka Daily Democrat* of March 11 reported that Willie took 60 horses with him when he left Topeka and that he intended to take his show to Australia.

One of Willie's employees was "Red" Laird, a Topeka thief of small success and smaller ambition. Red supplied Topeka with much entertainment until he attempted to blackmail one of the town's leading business men.

The *Journal* reported on March 27 that Willie's circus "will start out from Denver about April 15, provided 'Topeka Red' Laird is able to get there by that time. 'Red' says, 'De scarcity of gold as a circulatin' medium is due ter Billy Sells having so much of it on his circus wagons.' Sells considers himself fortunate in wintering so far west, inasmuch as he can get over a large area of the best paying circus territory in the country before the other circuses strike the west at all."

"Crook" Wright was another of Willie's employees who had a problem with telling his property from that of others. After six weeks on the show Crook returned to Topeka and was interviewed June 13 by the *Journal*.

"Crook" Wright was one of the several Topeka people who started out to share the joys and sorrows of circus life with Willie Sells when he started out from Denver this spring. 'Crook' is a well known colored character about town, and his capacity with the circus was that of cook in the performers' tent. He left the circus at Jetmore, Montana, he says because he couldn't draw his salary regularly enough to suit him.

"When there wasn't a blind baggage [door step at the end of a

# ONLY BIG SHOW COMING Beyond the Reach of Jealous Rivals

Vol. IV, Chapter Six, Part Two  
BY ORIN COPPLE KING

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railroad baggage car] handy Wright 'hit the bumpers.' The result was that when he got to Topeka his trousers were torn and spotted, his shirt was lacking several yards of the goods originally put into the garment by the maker, and his gen-

eral appearance was such that his society friends might fail to recognize him.

"Crook" went around among his white friends, got clean linen from one, a pair of good trousers from another, and finally a white vest and a pair of tan shoes. Within a few hours after his arrival ragged and penniless, he was walking on Kansas avenue with his old friends with all the reckless abandon of a circus magnate, attired as stylishly as though

he was the only son of rich and indulgent parents.

"Crook" says that the circus did a big business until they encountered snow last week up in the mountains. He brings the glad news that 'Topeka Red' Laird is the king of the side-show grafters, and that the 'head candy butcher' who is also a Topeka man, has earned a roll as big as his hat."

The New Great Syndicate Shows and Paris Hippodrome, formerly known as Sells & Rentfrow, played its first Kansas date of 1895 at Winfield, Friday, October 18. An advertisement carried in the *Industrial Free Press*, Winfield, proclaimed, "AT WINFIELD, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 18!"

"The Mighty Monarch of All Tented Exhibitions!"

"Its Record Unimpeachable, Imperishable, Unblemished, above the Reach of Jealous Rivals. THE NEW GREAT SYNDICATE SHOWS and Paris Hippodrome."

"Monster Museum, Triple Circus, Great Elevated Stages, Double Menagerie, Spectacular Pageant

"Grand Aggregation of New Sensational Features."

"RIALTO, the Strongest Man on Earth. VICTORIA, the most Majestic Royal Bengal Tiger ever in captivity. THE ONLY RIDING TIGER IN THE UNIVERSE. Actually performing equestrian feats beyond conception on the back of a flying thoroughbred while encased in an iron cage that circles the ring, to be seen only with these great shows. \$10,000 school of Educated Sea Lions. No other show possessing such an attraction.

"By an arrangement with the leading Shows of America this will be the Only Circus that will visit this section this year.

This Great Syndicate advertisement appeared in the *Abilene Monitor* on October 17, 1895. Kansas State Historical Society.

AT ABILENE, FRIDAY, OCT. 25.

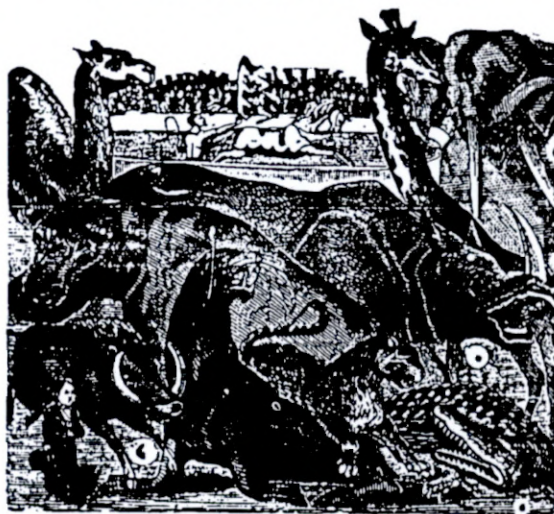
THE MIGHTY MONARCH OF ALL TENTED EXHIBITIONS!

Its record Unimpeachable! Unblemished, Imperishable, above the reach of jealous rivals.

COMING IN ALL ITS ENTIRETY!

## The New Great Syndicate Shows and Paris Hippodrome.

Monster Museum, Triple Circus, Great Elevated Stages, Double Menagerie, Spectacular Pageant, Grand Aggregation of New Sensational Features.



Victoria the most Majestic Royal Bengal Tiger ever in captivity. The only riding tiger in the universe. Actually performing equestrian feats beyond conception on the back of a flying thoroughbred while encased in an iron cage that circles the ring to be seen only with this show. \$10,000 school of educated Sea Lions. No other show possessing such an attraction. By an arrangement with the leading shows of America this will be the only circus that will visit this section this year.

PRESENTING AN UNABRIDGED AND UNPARALLELED PROGRAMME EXALCED IN ALL AND PURE IN TONE.

4 Big Shows Combined 4 100 SENSATIONAL AND STARTLING ACTS

The greatest barback riders that the world has ever produced. THE ONLY FLOCK OF GIANT AFRICAN OSTRICHES. The largest birds on earth and the only show possessing such a feature.

TWO MENAGERIES OF WILD BEASTS.

An open den of savage brutes, mammoth Elephants, Lions, Tigers, Hyenas, Leopards, Bears, Wolves and Panthers. Zebras trained to drive like horses. Knights in Armor, Ladies as Princesses, Male and Female Jockeys, houndstoes of Princesses, Nobles and Cavaliers in royal robes and etc., costumes, mounted on spirited horses like days of old. Be sure and ask your station agent for CHEAP EXCURSION RATES. Every railroad gives low rates to



"Presenting an Unabridged and Unparalleled Programme

"EXALTED IN AIM AND PURE IN TONE! 4--BIG SHOWS COMBINED--  
4 100 Sensational and Startling Acts:

The Best Performing Elephants!  
A Drove of Monster Camels!  
Leopards, and Baby Camels!  
Zebras, Bears and Baby Monkeys!  
40 Great Circus Acts!  
20 Great Leapers!  
5 Great Bands in Street  
Richly Carved and Gilded Parade!  
Tableau Wagons!  
Courtly Knights and Dames!  
Myriad Cages, Dens and Lairs!

"The greatest bareback riders that the world has ever produced.

"The only flock of Giant African Ostriches. The largest birds on earth and the only show possessing such a feature.

"TWO MENAGERIES OF WILD BEASTS. And open Dens of Savage Brutes, Mammoth Elephants, Lions, Tigers, Hyenas, Bears, Wolves, Leopards and Panthers. Zebras trained to drive like horses. Knights in Armor, Ladies as Princesses, Male and Female Jockeys, Squadrons of Princesses, Nobles and Cavaliers in Royal Robes and Rich Costumes, Mounted on Spirited Horses like Days of Old.

Be sure and ask your station agent for "CHEAP EXCURSION RATES. Every railroad gives low rates to this big show.

"At 10 a. m., a Glorious, Grand Holiday Free Street Parade. One day only, afternoon and evening. DOORS OPEN AT 1 AND 7 P. M.

"This will positively be the only Circus that will visit this section this year.

"General Admission, 50c; Children under 9 years of age, 25c."

During the short Kansas tour the Great Syndicate used handouts quoting the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, *Salt Lake News*, *Spokane Daily Tribune*, *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, *Pueblo Star*, *Phoenix Herald*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Anaconda Standard* and the *Galveston News*.

The *Louisville Courier-Journal*: "This excellent circus and menagerie was well patronized yesterday afternoon and evening, and it well deserved the enormous crowd which flocked to the capacious tents. The menagerie shows up all that has been advertised, and the ring performances were excellent, comprising many very difficult, attractive acts never before presented here. The riding was good. The clowns introduced many new comicalities, and the feats of acrobats, jugglers and contortionists were marvelous, and aston-



This illustration appeared in an 1895 Great Syndicate newspaper ad. Kansas State Historical Society.

ished and delighted all. We found all connected with the show perfect gentlemen, who desired to treat everyone well and see that no one was imposed upon."

The *Salt Lake News*: "The gigantic tent at Central Park could not contain half the number who scrambled for admittance to the New Great Syndicate Shows last night, and thousands were turned away. The streets were packed with people. Not only were the sidewalks crowded, but even the roadway was impassable, and the street cars had difficulty in forcing a passage.

"It did not look like hard times to see the struggling crowds scrambling for the ticket office, and when the bell finally rang up the entrance of the equestrian tournament, there was tier upon tier of spectators, with as many more satisfied with standing room. The spectators were magnificently entertained from the beginning to the end of the program. Everyone wore a broad grin for two hours, and then went home still smiling."

*Spokane Daily Tribune*: "The mammoth tent of the new great syndicate circus and Paris Hippodrome was crowded this afternoon. The sun beat down remorselessly upon acres of heavy canvas, but it was cool inside, and the grown-up people good naturedly munched peanuts. The small boy was in his element, irrepressible and omnipresent. Gallons upon gallons of circus lemonade were consumed and the monkey cage was showered with peanuts and candy.

"It is a great circus, everybody enjoyed it, and not a single person regretted being crushed, jammed and

amused for three hours. Everybody was there, and everybody will be there again this evening."

Advertising car No. 1 under the direction of Chas. Hanlon papered Winfield on October 7, according to the *Courier*. A. H. Deane & Co. erected billboards for "a real circus."

A handout in the *Courier* of October 7 named J. N. Rentfrow as manager and boasted that, "The circus is given simultaneously in three rings and on two elevated stages. The hippodrome is a quarter of a mile around."

A handout used by the October 10 *Courier* explained that, "The big birds usually called ostriches, now so extensively bred on the so-called ostrich farms of California are really not ostriches. They belong to the same species, but are a mongrel branch of the true family. Its native place is Australia and not Africa, and the bird is really an emu, and is only about half the size of the ostrich, and has not the brilliant and luxurious plumage of the latter bird.

"The only flock of African ostriches in America is owned by the Great Syndicate Circus whose well known circus exhibits in Winfield, October 18th. Six of them were imported by these managers and they are a wonderful feature. Each is as large as a horse, and can easily outrun that animal."

The handout of October 7 claimed three rings and two stages, but a later handout reduced the performance area to two rings and one stage.

Fred W. Lawrence, press agent, was in Winfield October 12, and reported to the *Courier* that the Great Syndicate moved on 28 cars in addition to four cars on the advance. Another advertising car in charge of A. Letchworth arrived on the 15th.

Willie claimed that no thugs or toughs were allowed with the show, but the *Courier* thought it wise "to prepare for them nevertheless. All shows claim this and they all have them more or less."

Top billing went to Victoria, the Riding Tigress. A handout used repeatedly in Kansas featured Victoria but went on to mention other notable acts.

Mentioned were the Martell Family, bicycles; Harry King and Paul Devene, trapeze; Frank Reed, bareback; Livingston Family, acrobats; Lorenzo and Lota, aerialists; Baby Henrietta Parsons, 9 years old, bareback; Minnetti, iron-jaw; Theodore Barretta, talking clown. Baby Henrietta was reported as earning \$80 per week.

The *Courier* was liberal in its coverage of circus day: "The following sign was written in chalk on Grow & Han-



len's bulletin board this morning: 'Wanted—at once fifty boys to carry water for the elephant—Geo. Neff at. P. O.' Mr. Neff was busy all morning standing off the boys and looking for the man who wrote it.

"Trainmaster G. F. Hawks came up with the circus this morning. He has been with the show since it struck the Santa Fe in Texas and says it is a good, clean show.

"Justice was locked up in its temple this morning while the court house boys saw the parade.

"The Great Syndicate shows have three press agents all of them nice men to do business with. J. R. Phillips is the press agent with the show.

"The public schools dismissed at recess this morning and the young folks were given until noon to see the circus parade and other attractions in the city.

"What with a circus in town, a show at the opera house, a horse show at Manning's hall and the street full of fakirs and medicine men, Winfield will present a very lively appearance tonight. If the stranger in the city can't find enough to amuse him he is hard to satisfy."

No one had a better reason to remember circus day than did O. J. Jones.

"O. J. Jones, proprietor of the Mercantile Clothing house, climbed to the top of a step ladder on the walk in front of the store this morning to get a better view of the circus parade as it passed and came very nearly paying dearly for the trouble. J. C. Rowland who was standing near with his baby handed the child to Mr. Jones and in his effort lost his balance and the ladder toppled and fell. Mr. Jones fell on his hip but in his effort to shield the child it was impossible to check himself and his head struck the pavement with sufficient force to knock him insensible. He was picked up in an unconscious condition and carried into the store. Doctors Emerson, Jacobus and Barrett were called and an examination made. It was found that no bones were broken and there was no fracture. Mr. Jones was taken to his home as soon as he recovered and no serious results are anticipated. The child was not hurt."

The following review appeared in the *Courier* on the 19th: "The circus yesterday afternoon was good and gave very general satisfaction. Some of the specialties were new and elicited considerable applause. The riding tigress was something entirely new and although she went through her part without a protest and was apparently in the very best humor there was a

sigh of relief when she was again safely locked inside her own cage. Her performance showed animal intelligence to a remarkable degree and Mr. McElroy, her trainer, handled her with the skill of an artist.

"The Japanese performers were specialists in their line and especially the two little boys were above the average. The expert cycling by the Martell family was the best ever seen in Winfield and some of the feats performed seemed almost impossible. This was probably the best part of the entertainment.

"The riding was very good and the trapeze performers were all right and the entertainment all round, although a little short, was very good.

"There was a strong wind blowing and the dust was almost shoe-mouth deep which made it disagreeable but the people enjoyed themselves just the same. There was a very light attendance last night and the program was cut in two. The performance lasted about forty minutes. The show went from here to Wellington where it plays today."

In a different column the *Courier* had more to say about the evening exhibition. "The manner in which the circus cut short the performance last night and the unseemly haste with which the tents and seats were taken down created considerable unfavorable comment. While it is true less than 100 tickets were sold last night, yet those tickets were bought in good faith and the management had no right to curtail the performance as they did without refunding the money. Several persons saw all there was of the circus and then attended the show at the Grand opera house."

Scarcely mentioned in the Winfield press was Hurlburt & Cahoon's Dog

This illustration appeared in an 1895 Great Syndicate newspaper ad. Kansas State Historical Society.



and Pony show which played day and date with the Great Syndicate.

The Winfield *Weekly Courier* reported that a shell game "was running wide open inside the tent of the side show Friday. It is also said that several Cowley county citizens bought a little experience with the concern which cost them all the way from \$5 to \$20."

The circus has forever been an inspiration to the youth of the nation, but efforts at emulation are not without risk, according to the *Weekly Courier*.

"Ray, the fourteen year old son of R. J. Gault, living on South Mansfield street fell from a tight rope walking exhibition Saturday afternoon late, and broke his left leg about half way from the knee to the ankle. The rope was stretched from the barn to another outbuilding and was about fifteen feet from the ground. Ray had walked the rope twice without adventure and says he would have made it again all right if the rope had not broken."

Circus day in Wellington on October 19 provided the merchants with "a rushing business," according to the Wellington *Monitor-Press*. "The combination of Saturday and circus day together with a good buying season, crowded their stores with eager purchasers all day long." Dry goods sold particularly well.

Circus day in Wellington was, in the words of the *Peoples' Voice*, "an exceptional 'show' day. There was not an arrest made because of the presence of the show in town, neither was there, so far as we have heard, any occasion for a single arrest on that account."

As for the exhibitions the *Voice* reported that, "The circus Saturday night was not very well attended and those who went were not very well entertained as the removing of tents and other apparatus caused much confusion. The dust in the large circus tent was simply terrible. It was oftentimes impossible for one to see people on the opposite side of the tent. The performance was cut very short at the night entertainment."

A celebrity of sorts, according to the *Voice*, arrived with the show.

"George Wolfe, the 'living skeleton' and son of John Wolfe of this city, severed his connection with the 'New Great Syndicate' show company last Saturday, and left for Chicago in company of another show man Sunday evening. They will there make arrangements to spend the winter in Atlanta, Georgia George Wolfe has been traveling with this show for some time as the 'living skeleton.' He is supposed to be and doubtless is the leanest man



living today. No one here knew who he was until he came into the city as he was not traveling under his real name. His physical condition is certainly remarkable and even wonderful, as it does not seem possible for anyone to exist in his almost fleshless condition. A large crowd of his Wellington acquaintances were at the station that evening when he left to see him start."

The Wellington *Daily Mail* ran a handout on show day quoting an unnamed press agent who claimed the Great Syndicate traveled on 70 cars.

Following the exhibitions at Augusta on October 21, the *Augusta Gazette* counted 17 cars in the show train.

Advertising car No. 2 arrived in Augusta October 17.

The *Augusta Press* reported that, "J. M. Hamilton is one of the proprietors of the Syndicate show that exhibited her last Monday. He is an old friend of District Clerk Makepeace, both being raised in the same town, Anderson, Ind. The two met here for the first time in many years. Mr. Makepeace had a jolly time with Mr. Hamilton, talking of boyhood days and visiting the circus."

After the show had come and gone the *Gazette* published the following: "The New Great Syndicate Shows and Paris Hippodrome arrived in this city with its train of 17 cars Sunday morning at 2 o'clock and by daybreak began erecting their tents on the grounds west of town."

"The street parade occurred Monday morning at 10 o'clock. It was about like the ordinary circus parade. It was quite long but the trappings were noticeably shabby, compared to most shows."

"The afternoon performance opened promptly at 1 o'clock. Passing into the menagerie, the usual animals with a show were observed. The only extra ones being a flock of 8 ostriches."

The main show was very good considering the crowd, only about 500. Of course this circus is not in the front rank, but it demonstrated its ability to give a first class performance had there been any encouragement.

"There were some splendid features introduced, such as the riding tiger, the iron jawed woman, Japanese performers, and trapeze artists."

"The performance lasted about two hours and was followed by the concert which might have been good but it wasn't."

"At the evening performance a very small crowd was present, and the show was cut short."

"They left at 11:30 p. m., for Elk City where they showed Tuesday. After a weeks work in Kansas, they will go

into winter quarters at Denver. It is our opinion that they might have seen a good show, if they had a crowd, as it was nearing the end of their season, many of their attractions had left them and they labored under difficulties. There was a noticeable absence of gambling and pickpockets with the circus. In fact everything was straight in this line."

The romantic--or frightful--or frightfully romantic story of the Riding Tigress was told in a handout used frequently in Kansas. The Elk City *Enterprise* ran it on October 18, heralding the exhibitions of October 22.

"If the New Great Syndicate Shows and Paris Hippodrome had nothing else to show the public their riding tigress



This illustration appeared in an 1895 Great Syndicate newspaper ad. Kansas State Historical Society.

alone would be worth the price of admission. This tigress is the only beast of the species that has ever been brought under subjection by man. Other wild animal tamers have subdued lions, bears, elephants, etc., but James McElroy, the chief tamer with the Syndicate Shows, is the only man on earth who ever succeeded in training a tigress. His success with Victoria has been nothing short of wonderful. She was captured by the Syndicate Shows animal hunters near Amoy, China, and was sent to this country when six months old. Mr. McElroy took charge of her and at the end of eighteen months had her trained so that at his bidding she will jump from the ground to the back of a galloping horse, leap through hoops of fire, waltz on her hind feet, and keep a firm seat while the horse jumps over hurdles six feet high. Her education cost the lives of Henry Chappelle, one of Mr. McElroy's assistants, and two horses, all of whom were torn to pieces by the tigress. She performs inside a large circular steel cage

that completely encircles one of the three rings and from which escape is impossible."

The day in Elk City was bad for everyone, showman or citizen, according to the *Enterprise*.

"The Great Syndicate Shows and Paris Hippodrome came as per advertisement and pitched their tents in Elk City on Tuesday, and we can state authoritatively and positively that the small blizzard which began blowing in the morning and continued nearly all day prevented our people from witnessing one of the very best circus performances now traveling. The high wind made it almost impossible to put up a tent and at one period during the day the managers gave up the idea of performing at all, but finally concluded to do the best they could. The menagerie tent was blown down almost as soon as it was erected, so the majority of the cages were taken back to the railroad and loaded on the train. The circus tent was put up only a few feet above the people's heads, so it was impossible to perform the best acts. The trapeze could not be put up, and the chief feature of the show, the equestrian performance of the trained tigress, had to be abandoned. It was unfortunate for the managers and visitors alike that the weather turned out so badly. The audience was small and this, no doubt, had its effect on the performance, as the high priced actors are paid by the 'job.' We trust that this show will visit us again and that the weather will not interfere with their performance. It requires forty-eight cars and two engines to haul the outfit."

In a different column the *Enterprise* told a tale typical of Willie's shows. "A gang of sharpers and swindlers came in with the circus last Tuesday and a number of our citizens who attempted to buck the tiger are wiser and poorer as a consequence. The men who lost money gambling with these fellows deserve little sympathy, but we are informed they went so far as to snatch money out of people's hands, and give them short change for bills. No game was too desperate for them to play. In the evening while the show was being loaded on the cars a number of our sports went over to the depot to remonstrate with the gang for their misdeeds, but a few badly peeled heads was the only consolation they got for their trouble. Some of the showmen also were a little damaged, one man being struck on the head with a brick bat. One of the Elk City boys had his neck scorched with a bullet, but with the exception of a half dozen or so sore



heads nothing serious resulted from the encounter."

The Eureka Times gave the show a tepid review. "The show has come and gone. The day was a fair one [Wednesday, October 23]. The parade was good and so was the performance in the afternoon and fair at night. A large crowd was in town and attended the show. It was a better show than the people expected to see and hence gave good satisfaction."

On October 12, the Winfield Courier reported the show moving on 28 cars with four cars in advance; the Wellington Daily Mail, October 19, reported the show on 70 cars; the Augusta Gazette, October 25, had it on 17 cars; the Elk City Enterprise, October 25, claimed that the show required 48 cars and two locomotives.

Did every reporter in Kansas fail arithmetic?

The only comment in the Strong City Derrick concerning the exhibitions of Thursday, October 24, was, "Andy Fritze is the possessor of one of the performing roosters seen in the side show Thursday. It is a thoroughbred Brown Leghorn and a beauty, and had escaped from the manager the night of the show. Andy is a great chicken fancier and thinks much of his bird, but says should the proprietor ask for it he will willingly give it up."

Fred W. Lawrence, advance agent, was in Abilene October 15, and made an attempt to get the city license fee reduced from the \$50 demanded by the city ordinance. When the city refused, the show secured a lot outside the city limits and the city received nothing for the exhibitions of Friday, October 25.

"The Paris Hippodrome and Syndicate Shows," the Weekly Chronicle reported, "gave a very creditable afternoon performance Friday, but cut the program badly at night. The attendance was light and the show deserved better patronage."

A handout written by a circus press agent appeared in the Salina Daily Republican on circus day October 26.

"The big show arrived in town this morning, and coming to us as they did, well advertised, splendidly recommended and beautifully equipped, throngs of people lined our principal thoroughfares to witness the one mile parade, which was both interesting and instructive."

The most startling statement of the handout was, "The management is composed of Christian gentlemen and seem to hate a liar as they hate a rat-

tle snake." Willie Sells? J. N. Rentfrow? J. M. Hamilton?

All four of Salina's newspapers commented on the absence of a parade and the low attendance.

"The circus which exhibited here last Saturday," according to the Salina Sun, "was a very good show. The menagerie was also fair. The place of exhibition was in Kenwood park, near the bridge, outside the city limits. This place was selected to avoid paying the \$110 license asked by the city--and we understand the show proposed to cut the sum in twain but was refused. The consequence was the promised parade was denied by the city and did not take place. The afternoon entertainment was fairly patronized, but at night a slim crowd was present and for that reason perhaps and on account of a strong wind prevailing was curtailed to a half hour's duration."

This advertisement appeared in the November 1, 1895 Yates Center Farmer's Advocate. Kansas State Historical Society.

## The BIG SHOW of THE UNIVERSE

COMING ON ITS OWN SPECIAL TRAINS.

The World's Greatest Amusement Consolidation.

A COALITION OF  
SAND'S GREAT AMERICAN EXHIBITIONS  
—AND—  
ASTLEY'S RENOWNED EUROPEAN SHOWS.

Organized in London, England, in 1890, for a Continuous Tour of the Globe.

This Marvelous and Altogether Unprecedented Alliance will exhibit at



YATES CENTER, TUESDAY, NOV. 5.

## 3 Ring Circus 3

THE MOST COMPLETE MENAGERIE PRESENTED

Rare wild animals, beast, birds and reptiles from every zone.

Real Roman Hippodrome,

Scenes of Ancient Greece and Rome Re-enacted.

Grand Ethnological Museum of Phenomenal Wonders, all nations favorites.

OVER 100 ARENICO CELEBRITIES.

The Chosen Stars of Every Continent and Clime.

Full 1,000 Special First Time Features.

Never Before Seen By American Audiences.

TEN TIMES THE BEST SHOW ON EARTH.

Grand Free Spectacular Street Pageant in the Forenoon.

Admission Reduced to 50c. Children, 25c.

Those connected with the circus appeared to be gentlemen."

The McPherson Daily Republican reported on circus day, Monday, October 28, that, "The weather began to behave in a very wintery manner today and overcoats came very handy," but attendance suffered only moderately.

On November 1 the McPherson Democrat stated that, "There was a good sized audience present both at the afternoon performance and in the evening. The show was good, everybody speaking in the highest praise of the performance and the gentlemanly conduct of the management. There was an absence of the usual skin games which generally follow up shows of this kind."

The Great Syndicate abruptly ended its season following two exhibitions at Marion on October 29.

The Marion Record noted that, "The crowd on the streets was larger than can be seen here the busiest Saturdays." The Record closed its minimal report with "A good rain, accompanied by some snow and sleet, fell here Tuesday night. Good for the wheat."

The following stands were cancelled: October 30, Newton; November 1, St. John; October 31, Sterling; November 2, Larned.

The Newton Republican, November 1, reported the season's end. "The Syndicate shows reached Newton this morning from Marion in a cold drizzling rain. Business has been very poor with the circus for a week or more on account of the cold weather and when a freezing rain began to fall, the management decided not to unload the aggregation here at all. The show is on its way to Denver to winter and had made several dates between here and Larned on its way out. These dates were all cancelled and the circus equipment will go direct to Denver. A museum will be established there which will be operated during the cold weather. This was the plan pursued last winter and the proceeds paid the expense of wintering the apparatus and of making repairs."

"The disbanding of the circus employees--185 in all--was a novel and highly interesting sight. The employees, of all nationalities and rank, were paid off this morning and a happier looking set would be hard to find. There was no grumbling and each employee felt that he had been well treated by the show management. The first thing done was to go up town and buy clothing and other articles. Hundreds of dollars were left with the merchants and hotel men. If there is any-



one that thinks that a circus coming here under the circumstances of the present one is a detriment to the town, he should have seen the circus men spending money in the city today.

"All was excitement at the station. Baggage in immense quantities was taken to the baggage room and tickets procured by the actors for their homes or wintering places. Some went to New York, a few to Texas, the Japanese acrobats bought tickets to San Francisco. The bicycle family went to Canada and a family of tumblers left for the northern states. By to-morrow the circus people will be as far separated as the trains can make them. The fat man and the skeleton and the other freaks remained with the circus and will serve in the Denver museum.

"It was a sad sight to watch the last good byes that were said to each other by the performers. The lemonade vender and the side show screecher almost wept when they bid each other farewell. Each man wished his friend good luck and expressed the desire to see him next season. Many of the performers renewed their contracts with the management of the circus for next season. During the winter they will drift about from one place to another and at the beginning of the season next year will probably be strapped.

"The animals were taken out of the cars here and fed. The horses were put up at the city livery stables and again taken to the circus cars this evening. The aggregation will reach its destination Friday. The children and a number of others were disappointed this morning at parade time not to see the elephant put in an appearance. Newton was certainly lucky it spent no money with the show and the show left a good deal of cash here."

The general attitude of the press in the cancelled towns was in tune with the remark of the St. John County Capital that, "Plenty of people are ahead the price of several pairs of shoes."

Topekan Fred McMann returned home at the end of October. McMann was in charge of advertising car No. 4, and reported that, "Willie had a very prosperous year.

"Willie Sells has sold his interest in the Sells & Rentfrow to his partner J. N. Rentfrow," according to the Topeka: *Daily Democrat*, December 9.

"The deal was consummated at Denver during the past week."

\*\*\*\*\*

A show without a name played Arkansas City on October 26, 1895. An advertisement in the *Daily Reporter* announced, "Special Attraction! SATURDAY, OCT. 26!

"12--Beautiful Trained Horses--12

"Large Troupe of Educated Dogs.

"They do Everything but Talk.

"10--SPECIALTY ARTISTS--10

"Presenting all new features,

"Songs, Dances, Etc.

"3 LARGE SHOWS IN ONE 3

"Biggest Company of the Season.

at the opera house tomorrow, October 26, is Little Adel Phillips, the child wonder, who will introduce the brilliant Shadow and Sun dance. This will be without doubt a marvelous and wonderful act for a child to perform, displaying a rich and dazzling array of costly costume of which she will make six complete changes while on the stage; not only showing ease, grace and perfect positions, but of hard study and practice, taught by Prof. Si-ville, dancing master, New York."

And in another column, "Grand free exhibition on the corner of Fifth avenue and Summit street. Driving horses without lines. Twelve of these beautiful horses will also be in parade tomorrow at 1 p. m. Matinee performance at 2 p.m., sharp."

After the show had gone the Arkansas City *Canal City Dispatch* reported, "A dozen horses on the stage at one time is an unusual sight, but such a sight was to be seen at the opera house Saturday evening. They were well trained, and so was the donkeys and the dogs. It was a good show, but not very well patronized here."

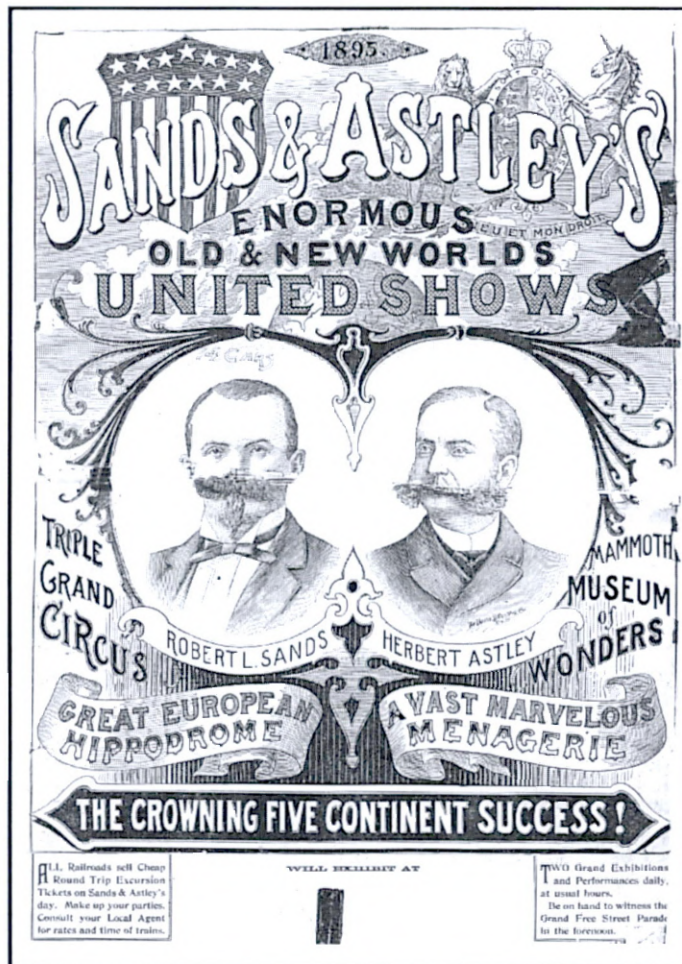
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It was a sad day for Engineer Hill, October 30, when he was sent south to get the circus train that was billed for Pittsburg for November 1, 1895. The *Pittsburg Daily Headlight* explained that, "The circus train provided a circus for the crew sent out with it. There were no brakes on the cars and the boys found it hard to handle. A few empty coal cars supplied with brakes were added to the train and made it possible to handle it."

Thanks to a fool-hardy train crew, Sands & Astley's Enormous Old and New World's Shows exhibited in Pittsburg on time. A one-column ad in the *Headlight* described the

wonders to be seen with Sands & Astley.

"Coming on Its own Special Train!  
"SANDS & ASTLEY'S Enormous Old and New World Shows Europe and America's Greatest Exhibitions United! Two Grand Menageries, Rare Wild Animals From every Continent and Clime.  
"Specimens and Species Never Before Seen in America.  
"Monster Gathering of Arenic Stars  
"Over 100 Peerless Meteors.  
"Every Nation Represented



Front cover of a Sands & Astley newspaper courier. Note reference to "14 cars." Pfening Archives.

"Look at these prices: 15, 25, 35 and 50C.

"Everybody can go! See the grand free street parade SATURDAY at 1 o'clock.

"Seats are selling at W. H. Upton's book store.

"MUNGO AND MINGO.

"The Hit of the Season."

The day before the exhibitions the *Reporter* reported that, "Among the many features with the company which plays



"The Most Dazzlingly Brilliant Performance

"THE GREATEST EXHIBITIONS,

"THE GRANDEST DISPLAYS,

"Beside which the efforts of other shows are ???? and commonplace.

"Full 1,000 Foreign Features Entirely New To American Audiences.

"THE LARGEST AND SMALLEST ELEPHANTS IN CAPTIVITY.

"More Elephants, Camels and Rare Wild Animals than owned by any other organization on earth.

"The World's Research, Every Country Explored

"A Princely Fortune in Animate and Inanimate Wonders.

"We Never Change Date. We Never Postpone.

"Will Most Positively Exhibit as above.

"THE CHANCE OF A LIFE TIME!

"2 Grand Exhibitions and Performances Daily.

"Doors Open at 1 and 7 P. M. PITTSBURG, FRIDAY, NOV. 1st."

"At last this locality," a handout in the *Headlight* stated, "is to have an exhibition of equestrian, gymnastic and atheletic (sic) performers, a complete zoological collection, a hippodrome and museum which is worthy of the title of circus, menagerie, hippodrome and collection of rare and remarkable curious (sic). There have been many traveling shows claiming this title or similar ones of high sounding, but the Sands & Astley's New and Old World shows to exhibit here at Pittsburg on Nov. 1, will fully substantiate its merit and superiority."

Perhaps Ringling Brothers' World's Greatest Shows which had played Pittsburg on October 2, was, by comparison to Sands & Astley, unworthy of the title of circus, menagerie and hippodrome, but the Ringling press department was certainly superior to that of Sands & Astley.

The amazing history of Sands & Astley was set forth in a handout on October 31: "Our readers will learn by reference to our advertising columns that Sands & Astley's New and Old World shows are to exhibit here at Pittsburg, (to-morrow) Friday, Nov. 1st. Comparatively few, however, who refer to the advertisement are aware of the fact that these shows have a history the most remarkable in amusement annals. This amusement Enterprise is the out growth of the consolidation of two of the largest shows in existence, one an American and the other a British institution. In

1890 a jointure was made of Robt. Sands' great American circus and menagerie with Herbert Astley's grand English circus, hippodrome, menagerie, museum and curio exposition. The compact was made in the city of London, and after touring England, Ireland, and Scotland the united amusement venture crossed over to the continent and exhibited in France, Belgium, Switzerland, Holland, Germany, Russia, Turkey, Algiers, Egypt, China, Japan, the Sandwich Islands and is now touring the United States prior to visiting Central America, Mexico and South America. There is no show, either in the past or present, that has traveled as many thousand miles, exhibited to such myriads of people or that has won a more exalted and enviable reputation."

A note in the *Headlight* the day before the exhibitions mentioned that "H. B. Hilton, Charles Pailing and J. Morris, attaches of the Sands and Astley shows,

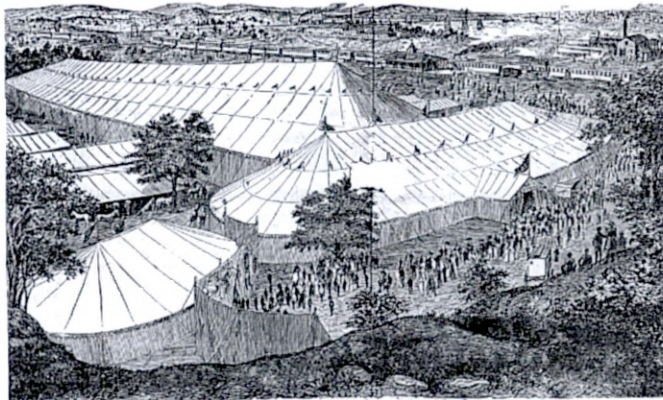


Illustration from the 1895 Sands & Astley courier. Pfening Archives.

arrived today. The shows are in Siloam Springs today."

The *Headlight* prophesied that, "red-lemonade will not have a great run at the circus on Friday, and the fan man had undoubtedly gone into winter quarters a month ago. Wraps and overcoats for rent would be a great 'graft' however."

On November 1, the *Headlight* commented that, "The crowd appeared on the streets to-day in spite of the cold chilly weather. It goes to demonstrate that there is only one thing else on this earth that will draw a bigger crowd than a circus and that is two circuses."

The *Headlight* after the exhibitions described "A Frozen Audience.

"The small crowd at the circus last night were not compelled to fight for seats by any means, but some of them would probably have been pleased to do so or indulge in some other violent exercise in order to obtain the warmth, that could not be had setting on the cold boards watching the performance, which

also had an icy appearance. The performers would go through with turns much after the manner of a man wading a snow drift, and while waiting for their partner to do his work would assume the appearance of a boy that did not have the energy to play fox and geese on a cold, sunny day after the ring had been made. Everybody was cold and the efforts of the acrobats, trapeze performers, bareback riders and the others were received by the audience with a shiver, not so much on account of their inferior work but just because it was the wrong time of year to look at them. However, the performers will not be compelled to do this sort of work much longer, as they will all be on their way to their homes in a couple of days while the show will be in winter quarters in Wichita."

In another story the *Headlight* related the plight of the circus employees:

"Herbert B. Hilton, the manager of the advertising department of the Sands & Astley show, was with one of his men, to use a circus phrase, 'redlighted' in this city last night. By this is meant that he was not allowed to go any further with the show. It was done he says, because he would not take \$25 and give them a clear receipt for the amount of over \$100 which he claims was due him as salary. This is his second year with the show, but last year he did

not let them owe him anything but collected up close. He says they have been 'redlighting' their employees at different places for the past month, which looks like a very reasonable story, and the great wonder of many who saw them here yesterday is that they did not 'red light' themselves judging from the dilapidated appearance of everything. The show is owned and controlled by J. R. [B.] McMahon and George Costello and is under the name of Sands & Astley as a sort of protection and has been on the road four years. The first year the two gentlemen called their layout the Raymond Combined shows; the second year Sawyer [Sanger] & Lents; the third year Howe & Cushing; and this year Sands & Astley, and next year will more than likely sail under something else. They will winter in Wichita and intend to start out in the spring and do Kansas and the west."

Swan Atchison, a member of the paste brigade, returned to his home in Joplin, Missouri, November 4.

The Pittsburg *Kansan* reported a free for all fight between the canvas



men and the bosses on Friday morning.

Chetopa saw the circus on Saturday, November 2, a day that passed without incident.

Sands & Astley billed Sedan for Monday, November 4. A two-column ad appeared in the *Sedan Lance*. On October 31 the *Lance* reported that, "The circus which was advertised last week for Sedan has decided not to come to Sedan, but will show Monday at Caney instead. They have changed their route and will not come any farther west."

The ad run previously in the *Lance* appeared again with Caney named as the lucky town. On circus day the editor of the *Lance* drove to Caney, possibly to collect the advertising bill.

Yates Center on November 5 was certainly not a winner for Sands & Astley. All of the papers in Yates Center had reports on the show.

The *Farmer's Advocate*: "Only about seventy-five persons attended the show Tuesday afternoon."

"Several scraps were reported at the show last Tuesday. The trouble arose among their own people and several busted mugs were the result."

"Some of our boys who have had a longing for a circus life had it removed Tuesday morning when they saw the employees of the Sands & Astley combination eating their breakfast. Circus life behind the scenes is far different from what it appears to the general public who witness it in the saw dust arena."

"The Sands & Astley aggregation of wonders which was billed to exhibit at this place on Tuesday last came in on schedule time but was one of the rottenest rocky affairs that ever spread its canvass in our city. The performance in the afternoon was so poorly attended that no attempt was made by the management to show at night and those who held complimentary tickets still have them in their inside pockets and will be glad to dispose of them at a liberal discount for cash in hand paid. Yates Center was to be their last stand for the season and the outfit was loaded on the cars and shipped to Wichita where they will go into quarters for the winter. God pity Wichita."

"As a result of Sands and Astley show being disbanded at this place a number of weary looking hobos, with breaths smelling like the rear door of a distillery were soliciting 'hand outs' Wednesday morning."

"The employees of Sands & Astley's show were paid off at this place last Tuesday night, and the out going freight trains were loaded to the gunwails with thugs and hobos who were bound for the large cities, where they will eke out a miserable existence as mendicants during the dreary winter months."

The Yates Center News: "The show

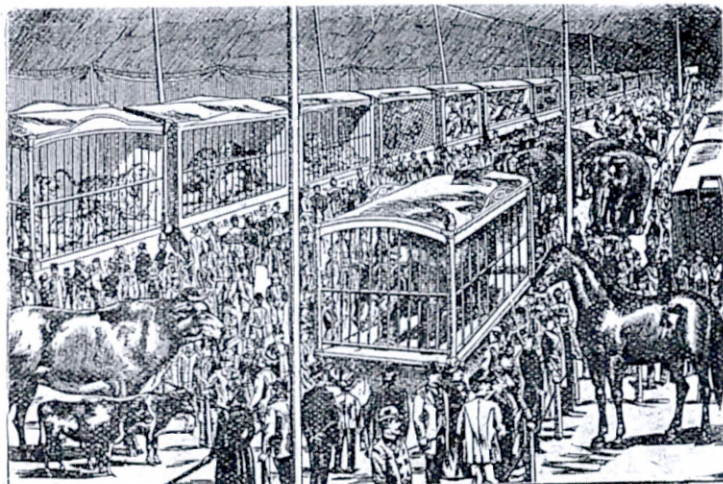


Illustration from the 1895 Sands & Astley courier. Pfening Archives.

disbanded here Tuesday night and threw sixty-five fellows out of employment and out of money."

"The Sands & Astley outfit did not unload all their show here last week. Fifteen cages of animals were left on the cars."

"Some of the show men with Sands & Astley's combination got away with a lot of lumber belonging to the Missouri Pacific at this place. Sheriff Reid went out to Wichita Friday and caught the guilty parties, but they were finally turned loose upon paying for the lumber and paying all expenses connected with their arrest and detention. It cost them enough to teach them a lesson."

"Sands & Astley's show played to poor business here Tuesday. They had trouble with their advance agent in the morning. He came here Monday and had the management enjoined from making their parade or giving an exhibition until his account for his summer's work was settled. They finally compromised with him by paying him part in money and in a note. Mr. Advance agent got gay after the settlement was made and pulled a gun on some member of the show crowd and some one struck him with a tent stake or some other heavy weapon that effectually smashed his nose and knocked him out. The peace officers took him away and cared for him. A very slim parade turned out between twelve and one o'clock and the

usual free exhibition was given immediately afterward. Late in the afternoon their regular performance was given. The rain storm came on about dusk and but few went to the show grounds at all. About eight o'clock in the evening they began to load their cars. As soon as this job was done the hands were cheated out of their wages and turned adrift; and the out-fit pulled out for winter quarters. Many of the canvass men, grooms, etc., sought accommodation in box cars and winged their way to other climes and many of them stopped here to beg. Sixty-five of their laborers were called up to the treasurer's office, given a small roll of money apiece and compelled to sign a receipt in full for all claims against the management. One man who claimed ninety dollars found that his roll of money contained one bill of a small denomination and one dollar in pennies."

*Woodson Gazette*, Yates Center: "The Sands & Astley show arrived on scheduled time and after exhausting the patience of the spectators, gave a very poor street parade. After a number of difficulties between employer and employee had been settled with the help of the sheriff, the usual afternoon performance was given to a very small audience. The company certainly lost money by stopping in Yates Center."

The last word on Sands & Astley's season of 1895 was carried by the *Wichita Daily Beacon* on November 6.

"The circus and menagerie of Sands & Astley came in this morning on the Missouri Pacific railroad from Yates Center where they showed yesterday. They have 13 cars of animals and paraphernalia."

"At 12 o'clock today the cars were pushed to the Gilbert Car works and unloaded. This is the McMahon circus that wintered here two years ago. They have selected Wichita as a wintering point in preference to any other point."

"It is not expected that any charge will be made to visit Sands & Astley's menagerie, but admission will be by invitation ticket. By Saturday at farthest, the show will be installed in its winter quarters and ready for inspection."

Research funded in part by grants from Wolfe's Camera & Video, Inc., Topeka, Kansas.



## CORRECTIONS

### FOREPAUGH-SELLS 1910 MAY-JUNE ISSUE

The Pfening article about 1910 Forepaugh-Sells stated, *inter alia*, that the rhino den was a former Ringling wagon, that the hippo cage was from Barnum & Bailey, and that the giraffe purchased for the show died and did not make the 1910 tour. Those statements are either erroneous or arise from evidence subject to different interpretations.

The rhino den came from the Barnum show, not Ringling. It is shown in a photo taken on Barnum & Bailey at Battle Creek, Michigan on August 4, 1909 and had been with that circus for twenty or more years, perhaps as far back as the 1870s. For a detailed account of this wagon see Reynolds in *Bandwagon*, July-August, 1993, p. 27.

Though the origin of the Egyptian flavored hippo cage pictured on page 13 (May-June) is less certain, it almost

surely did not come from Barnum & Bailey. It went to Barnum & Bailey from Forepaugh-Sells of 1910-1911, not the opposite direction. Available evidence strongly suggests that the Ringlings had this attractive hippo den built new for Forepaugh-Sells between 1905 and 1907 while they were managing that show from its traditional Columbus, Ohio base. It would have replaced an old, rather plain Sells Bros. hippo den (No. 55). This old one was no doubt the hippo wagon left behind in, and offered for sale at, Columbus in December, 1907 (ad in *Billboard*, 12/12/07). Meanwhile, there had to have been a hippo wagon on the road with Forepaugh-Sells during 1907 because the male hippo, Dick, was with the show that year and arrived in Baraboo with it at season's end. Axiomatically, he landed there riding in the Egyptian hippo den pictured on p. 13 of the May-June issue. By way of clarification, that particular photo was taken on the John Robinson circus around 1920 after Ringling-Barnum had sold the wagon to the Mugivan, Bowers, and Ballard circus syndicate.

As to the 1910 Forepaugh-Sells giraffe, the available evidence (Baraboo newspapers and Ringling business files in the Pfening archives) establishes that a female giraffe did arrive in Baraboo for Forepaugh-Sells in March, 1910 and that it was in poor condition. However, there is nothing stating that it died so that Forepaugh-Sells went "giraffeless" in 1910. To the contrary, the Otto Ringling estate inventory of all Forepaugh-Sells properties at the time of his death the next year (March, 1911) listed a single giraffe, described as "in poor health." Inferentially, at least, that would have been the same animal whose poor condition was noted in March, 1910 when it first arrived. Richard J. Reynolds, III

### FOREPAUGH-SELLS 1911 JULY-AUGUST ISSUE

The photo of the Fives Graces bandwagon on page 6 was identified as Iowa Falls, Idaho. Actually the photo was taken in Iowa Falls, Iowa.

# BILL KASISKA'S LETTERHEADS



Elmer H. Jones was known as the "King of the two car shows." He used a multitude of titles on his circuses that toured as late as 1936. The King & Tucker title was used in 1909.

The photo on the letterhead pictures a very young Jones. The letterhead is printed in orange and brown.



# Mike Martin's CIRCUS HOBBY HALL

## *Video Ideas for Holiday Gift Giving!*

**1. HIGH GRASS CIRCUS** - 1980, A behind the scenes look at Canada's Martin & Downs Circus with many well known U.S. performers featured. 60 MIN

**2. SILVER'S CIRCUS** - 1992, One of Australia's premiere shows presented by the famed Gasser family. 30 MIN

**3. BEST OF MOSCOW CIRCUS ACTS** - 1993, Some of the finest animal and human performer are seen. You won't believe the fantastic liberty camel act and more! 60 MIN.

**4. CIRCUS HORSE ACTS** - Two hours of horses, horses and more horses! Liberty, Dressage, Bareback, Comedy - all disciplines are included! Including John Herriott, Pat White, Sir Billy Baker, plus rare footage of the Cristiani Riders from the 30's. 120 MIN.

**5. CIRCUS ELEPHANT ACTS** - Another marvelous specialty tape featuring the best contemporary American trainers including Rex Williams, Fred Logan, Buckles Woodcock, Allen Campbell, Chip Arthurs, Donnie Carr, Caren Cristiani and more! 120 MIN.

**6. PROS & CONS OF CIRCUS ANIMALS** - 1992, A well balanced documentary produced in Europe. Both points of view are fairly covered 30 MIN.

**7. MOSCOW CIRCUS IN FRANCE** - 1987. More thrilling highlights of some of the best performers in the world. 60 MIN.

**8. CIRCUS SCOTT** - 1993, The Bronett Family's highly polished performance with Europe's finest talent Wonderful comedy, acrobatic and aerial performers, balanced with the best in trained animal presentations. 60 MIN.

**9. FINLANDIA, JR.** - 1985, Marvelous Scandinavian Circus featuring classy animal, aerial and ground acts. An entertaining, fun to watch show. 60 MIN

**10. 14th MONTE CARLO FESTIVAL** - 1988, Highlights of this widely acclaimed annual festival in Monaco. Premier performers, from around the world, compete for the ultimate recognition of their acts. 90 MIN

**11. "CIRCUS NOSTALGIA VOL. #4"** Take a colorful trip back to the show lots of the 40's and 50's. See Kelly-Miller, Cristiani, Mills and Hagen Bros. and Clyde Beatty Circus, plus the big rail shows of Cole and Dailey Bros. and rare footage of Hagenbeck-Wallace in the 30's. 120 MIN

**12. "R/B VOL. FOUR: 20's -50's"** - Rare footage of John & Mabel Ringling, May Wirth, Bird Millman, Lillian Leitzel and more. Sideshow acts of the 30's. Sarasota winterquarters 30's, and show highlights of the 50's. 120 MIN

**13. "GREAT AMERICAN CARNIVALS VOL. # 1"** - Real nostalgia for the Carnival and show train fan! You'll see the fabulous Strates Show in the 50's and 60's, plus rare views of Royal American Shows and many contemporary midways. 120 MIN

**14. 10th ANNUAL SARASOTA FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS**, All the sights, sounds and excitement of "Circus Week" in Sarasota! The Big Top Performance Competitions, the Outdoor Thrill Circus, plus, the "Mile of Smiles" Circus Street Parade and much more! 120 MIN

**15. "SUPER SIDE SHOW SPECIAL"** - Here's a really rare one! Relive the fun of the great side shows of the past. You'll see the modern day versions of the STRANGE, the ODD and the UNUSUAL! WARNING! Portions contain nudity and sights not for the young or squeamish! 90 MIN

**16. "I'M NOT A FREAK"** - An interesting inside look at the strange, odd and unusual. Features marvelous footage of the real modern day "Elephant Man" Bob Melvin. 30 MIN

**17. ARENA DER SENSATION** - Here's a spectacular German production from 1987. Fantastic ice, stage, circus and variety acts perform in the famed Deutschland Halle. 90 MIN.

**18. CANADIAN CIRCUS SCHOOL** - North America's only national school devoted to the circus arts. Get a behind the scenes look at the inventive minds who are producing some of the most creative contemporary performers today. 60 MIN.

Combine the programs of your choice to make a two hour (120 minute) tape. \$29.50. These and over 200 circus videos are listed and described in our 10 page catalog. Send \$1.00 for your copy today. Sent free with all orders. Programs, posters, books, photos, rare and unusual material are all listed in our latest edition.

All orders in the Continental U.S. and Canada Postpaid. Europe and the rest of the world please add \$6.00 per item ordered.

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Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33331  
Fla. residents add 6% Sales tax



# Circus Life and Adventure of ADAM BARDY



A Connecticut magazine recently wrote this about Adam Bardy's book:

"If you're still a kid at heart when the circus comes to town, you'll love Adam Bardy's life story of his adventures of circus life. Adam Bardy was born in Webster on May 21, 1907. Back in 1907 thousands of immigrants from Europe kept coming to America.

"Bardy's life might be compared somewhat to Mark Twain's boyhood heroes Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, and back in 1907 in June, Mark Twain met George Bernard Shaw in London. It was a rainy Saturday when the Buffalo Bill Circus came to Webster. Adam Bardy was only 8 years old when he crawled into a circus wagon that night. However on Sunday morning when he crawled out of his hiding place, he wanted to get back home. Bardy had to have a guardian angel as he got back home before he was missed.

"In 1924 Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey Circus played in Worcester. Bardy's interest in the circus was renewed and he got a job with the side show. The circus liked getting young men to join them because it was out of young people that real circus troupers were made.

"Bardy found that circus life in the roaring twenties was rough and tough. On sunny days it was wonderful, but on rainy days you went to bed in the circus cars with wet clothes, and you would have to wait for a sunny day to dry out. If you could put in a full circus season under these conditions, you would be called a real trooper. In the twenties Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey was a railroad circus. It traveled in four sections. The first section was the cookhouse crew along with some circus wagons that carried the cookhouse. The second section carried most of the circus wagons and the stock cars full of work horses and nearly all the working crew. The third section carried the wild animal cages. There were 43 elephants with the circus.

"One of our heroes was Tom Mix and on Saturday afternoon when the local movie theater featured westerns. Tom Mix and his wonder horse Tony was a favorite of young and old movie fans. We recall that Tom Mix was with the Sells Floto Circus and we were invited to attend the circus and see Mix in person in Willimantic. Adam Bardy was working with the Sells-Floto Circus at the time and knew Mix very well. There were more circuses in business in the twenties than there are now. Hagenback and Wallace, John Robinson, Al G. Barnes, Sparks and Walter L. Main were some of the big ones

"Few folks realized that Tom Mix was at one time a real sheriff, a Deputy U.S. Marshall, a Texas Ranger, a real cow puncher and ranch foreman. He was even Roughrider under Teddy Roosevelt. For Bardy to personally know and work with Mix was one of the truly great thrills of his wonderful life. Mix was one of the truly greats of the silent movies.

"Adam Bardy at the age of 86 can look back at his many adventurous experiences in the circus, life with Gypsies, fortune telling, bootlegging, marriages, and finding love and happiness.

"He has written a book The Circus Life and Adventure of Adam Bardy. This book would have made a wonderful movie with enough wholesome family desires of an eight year old "running away" for a day; joining the circus and becoming a boss canvasman and having his crew set up the big circus tent while still a teen-ager. Fortune telling, boxing, bootlegging, and after four score years becoming a successful author. With the right promotional agency, the life and adventures of Adam Bardy could be made into a television series that might parallel the Untouchables and Little House on the Prairie. Many men desire the anonymity of Mister X but Adam Bardy is a real Mr. X . . . Ex-Circus Man, Ex-Pugilist, Ex-Still Operator, Ex-Bootlegger, Ex-Fortune Teller, and an excellent author."

The book includes many pictures that tell the life story of Adam. For an autographed copy of Circus Life and Adventure of Adam Bardy, send check or money order for \$12.95 to:

**ADAM BARDY**  
87 Alm Rd.  
Thompson, CT 06277